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AS THAT TERRIBLE MISSILE OF DEATH DESCENDED, THE DISGUISED DETECTIVE CAUGHT IT IN HIS OPEN HANDS.

OR, THE TIGERS OF NO MAN'S LAND.

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ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. ELI.

A WILD and lawless section is the belt of country lying between Western Kansas and the Texas Panhandle, and known as the "Neutral Strip" or "No Man's Land." It is practically without law or Gospel; belongs to no State or Territory; has had no legislation in its behalf; and until within a very recent period, has been apparently forgotten by the general Government.

Hence it has become, to a considerable extent, a place of refuge for the reckless characters of the border; and its population has a goodly percentage of men whose records would not bear investigation.

Notwithstanding all this, No Man's Land contains many excellent people. The men who do business in the little towns, dignified by the name of cities, are generally reliable; and the growing scarcity of Government land has filled the country with honest squatters and boomers of the Oklahoma type.

Eli, or the City of Eli, as it was vauntingly named, lay on the wide, flat plains between the Cimarron River and the North Fork of the Canadian. The surrounding plains were dotted with rival towns, and the company backing this particular infant city called it Eli, as expressive of their belief that, in the race for permanency, supremacy and prosperity, it would "get there."

Into this ragged shanty town, came, one dusty, windy afternoon, a greasy Jew peddler, with a monstrous pack upon his shoulders.

His features were heavy and stolid, his dark eyes dull and lusterless, and he was clad in a rather dilapidated suit of black. The perspiration trickled in little rivulets down his dust begrimed face, and his general appearance was fully as unwholesome as that of the worst of his class.

Reaching a shady corner, he tossed his pack to the ground, seated himself upon it, and mopped his face vigorously with a red bandanna.

"Ach, mine Gott!" he murmured, "dis vos de hottest gountry dot I struck in a lonk while. It musd pe a booneert und lefendeeen tecrees in de shate alre'ty! If it gids mooch varmer, de houses vill catch avire."

The entrance of the Jew into the town had attracted the attention of a number of loungers, and these soon collected about him in the grateful shade of the building.

The Israelite evidently had no intention of losing so good an opportunity to dispose of his wares. He removed the straps from his pack and spread out a gorgeous array of cheap jewelry, wearing apparel, trinkets and the various odds and ends which go to make up such an outfit.

"Shendleman!" he cried, with a suave and oily smile. "I haf whalked more as a hoonert mile dot railroat vrom vor de oxpress burbose of zeeing a down dot vos named vor a Hebrew. Eli vos a name dot you don't oxpect to pe ashamed of poody guick. Mine grandfodder vos whalk arount py dot name; und I gan rec'member so vell as yistertay dot he say undo me: 'Moses'—dot vas my name, Moses Rosen-thal—ven you haf some leadle ploys und gyurls of your own pe zhure dot you names dhem Eli."

"You hafe a putiful blace here, shendleman, so putiful as dis diamont ring vot I now show. Dot ring vas vort fifty tollar in New York, but I vill sell him do you so sheap you vill t'ink dia-monts musd pe growing rount on de buffalo grass."

A would-be sport snapped the ring up at a dollar; and the bidding for gew-gaws and pinchbeck jewelry soon became lively.

Near the center of the crowd, eying the Jew with a curious, questioning stare, was a stalwart young Irishman, dressed in a suit of pale-green cloth, and whose reckless, dandified air marked him as a sport and gambler, if not worse. A glossy, silk tie surmounted his jetty locks. His face was dark, but not especially forbidding. It would have been handsome but for the cruel smile that constantly lurked about the firm lips.

The young Irishman was known in Eli as Emerald Green. Few, however, believed that to be his real name. Perhaps he bestowed the name upon himself in memory of the home of his early boyhood, the Emerald Isle. No trace of the brogue could be detected in his speech, and his general appearance and manners indicated that he had been in America almost from his infancy.

"It must surely be only a queer resemblance!" mused Emerald, as he stared at the greasy Jew. "Bob Brentwood couldn't have come back to life. No! that is the wildest idea that ever got into my silly head. I never make a mistake. When I pull on a man's heart, as I did on the heart of Bob Brentwood, he is not apt to walk around again in the flesh."

"And then I had a good look at Brentwood's face after he fell, and if ever a man was dead he certainly was."

He pulled uneasily at his mustache and listened attentively to the voice of the Jew.

"But, yet, that sounds like Brentwood's voice.

It is disguised, of course. Brentwood was good at such things. He could make his voice sound like the voice of a Chinaman, if he wanted to.

"It seems to me that that is certainly Brentwood, and it seems equally certain that it cannot be. If it is, he is after me again; and I will have to kill him a second time, for I won't be taken."

"There is one thing sure. I don't believe the fellow is a Jew. He looks like one, and yet his nose is not strictly of the Jewish type. It is Bob Brentwood's nose, for all the world!"

"Perhaps it is not best to take any chances. Brentwood was a detective, and whether this fellow is Brentwood or not I am positive that he is also a detective, rigged up in that Jew outfit. It's an old dodge, but I have seen too many of the guild at close quarters not to know the cut of their jibs when I run across them."

"Now this detective is not here solely for the purpose of selling cheap jewelry. He is after some one, and the chances are nine out of ten that I am the individual wanted. No, it won't do to take any chances!"

Having reached this conclusion, Emerald slowly worked his way out of the crowd and disappeared.

There was another man in the throng, a stranger to Emerald, and, in fact, to most of the people of Eli, who regarded the Jew with an equally watchful and suspicious eye.

He leaned with apparent carelessness against an awning-post and smoked lazily at a cigar. Yet he watched every movement of the Jew, without appearing to do so, and his ears carefully drank in every word.

He was a small man, with a yellowish complexion and glittering beady eyes. He had been in Eli only a few weeks. Ostensibly he was a broker and money-lender; and the tin sign that creaked in the wind above his office door bore only the words, "Saffron Sol." Who he was or where he came from no one knew.

As he furtively watched the peddler and noted every turn and accent of the latter's voice, his musings bore a strange similarity to those indulged in by Emerald Green:

"If that isn't Bob Brentwood it must be his ghost. I saw Brentwood fall, and I know my bullet killed him! Then, who is *this*? It is Brentwood's face and figure, and Brentwood's voice. The disguise, and the Dutch-Jew dialect don't fool me worth a cent. That fellow is a detective, and he is after some one, and that some one is me. I'd be willing to bet a pile on that!"

As the trafficking proceeded Sol's face grew more and more mystified, though he evidently tried to conceal it, and maintain his careless manner.

"It's enough to make a fellow believe in the theory that dead men do sometimes return to earth for purposes of vengeance. Who knows but what our grandfathers were right and that the dead do come back? Ugh! It gives me the horrors! Dead or alive, I know that that is Bob Brentwood!"

He removed his cigar, listened intently and then continued:

"Yes; that's Brentwood! If he's a spirit, I'm not much afraid of him. But he's not a spirit. Spirits don't talk that way, and they wouldn't wear such greasy clothes. And I never heard of a spirit going into the cheap jewelry and second-hand clothing business. He couldn't have been dead, as I thought; though how he could live with that hole over his heart, beats me. Phew! It's enough to run a man crazy!"

He was about to turn away and seek relief for his overcharged emotions in a change of scene, when an event occurred to detain him.

Emerald Green returned and mingled carelessly with the throng. Close at his heels came the mayor and the marshal—for Eli, though lawless, boasted a legal code of its own enactment, and claimed to have officials to carry its provisions into effect.

"There's the man!" cried the mayor, in a loud voice, pointing to the Jew. "You will arrest him at once, and I call on every man hyer to assist in takin' him, if necessary."

A tremendous confusion instantly followed. The Jew looked blankly at the official and then ran his dull eyes appealingly over the astonished crowd.

"Vot vos dis vor, eh?" he managed to ask, after several ineffectual attempts. "Dose rings vot I zell vos shoost as I rebresend dhem! I haf here de cuarantee vrom de manuvaucturairs dot dose rings vos chenuine Alaska diamonds. So hellup me cracious, I wouldn't sweat a sinkle man dot leef in a down dot vos named like mine grandfodder!"

"We ain't arrestin' you, old man, fer cheatin'

anybody!" said the marshal, laying his hand on the Jew's shoulder. "If men git bit a-buyin' your truck, that's their own lookout. We're arrestin' you for sellin' on the streets o' Eli without a proper license from the mare."

It was news to the citizens of Eli that such a permit had to be procured.

"I vos tolト dot no license voult pe charged in dis gountry, vot belonks to no man," the Jew protested. "I vos a stranher here, und I t'ought dot you hat no laws like dot."

"Come along," growled the marshal, shaking him roughly. "We don't keer about listenin' to a speech jist now. Gether up yer things. Ef you have any proper excuse it'll be listened to to-morrow."

Seeing that further protestations would be of no avail, the Jew huddled his goods into the pack, and followed the marshal to the little jail, where he was incarcerated for the night.

CHAPTER II. THE TIME-BOMB.

AFTER Emerald Green had wormed his way out of the crowd surrounding the Jew he slipped into a by-street and hurried to the office of Grizzly Martin, the mayor.

"Eh! what's up?" demanded Martin, as Emerald rushed breathlessly into the office. "You look like you'd seen a ghost."

"Something more dangerous to us than a ghost, I'm afraid," averred the Irishman, sinking into a chair and stroking his mustache nervously.

Martin could only scratch his grizzled head and stare wonderingly at his visitor.

"Yes," continued Emerald. "It's worse than a ghost, as far as we're concerned. *There is a detective in the town!*"

Martin leaped from his seat as if a pistol had been fired at him.

"A detective?" he gasped. "What's he hyer fer?"

"I'm not positive, of course," with a smile at Martin's startled face and staring eyes. "But my opinion is that a couple of men about answering our description wouldn't be far from the mark. There are others, but we, as prominent men, would be struck at first."

"Where is the feller?" growled the mayor, savagely. "Curse his pictur', we'll have to down him! You ain't mistaken about this, I reckon?"

"No, I can't be. I've seen the man before. He's at the corner below now, entertaining the boys. His name is Bob Brentwood, and he is one of the shrewdest detectives in the United States to-day."

"What, that greasy old Jew? Oh, you must be away off."

"Not a bit of it, Grizzly," Emerald asserted, stoutly.

"Well, ef you're *certain* about it, somethin' ought to be done. It seems like a big story to swaller. What's your idee? I suppose you've cooked up some kind of a plan?"

"Yes; I have! But you're the man to carry it out. You must have the fellow arrested and thrown into jail. I will take care to see that he never comes out alive!"

"But he ain't a-doin' anything that we kin arrest him fer, as I kin see!" Grizzly replied, thoughtfully. "We'll have to charge him with somethin', you know. We'll have to pretend that the law is a-backin' us, even ef it ain't."

"Pull him for selling on the streets without a license!" the Irishman suggested.

"Hain't anything said in our law on the subject!"

"No!" Emerald admitted. "There isn't. But you'll be safe in taking that course. This is the first case of the kind. The Jew is the first peddler that ever struck the town of Eli. Hence, there has been no occasion, until now, for any action upon the subject. In the interests of the merchants of the town you can take the law into your own hands. The Jew is taking custom from them; and they'll stand by you in any effort you may make to stop it. You see the point?"

"You bet!" said Grizzly, seizing his hat. "I'll put him in jail fer ro'bin' our citizens of their rights. Then ef somebody gits away with the galoot durin' the night, nobody can't blame me fer it."

He called to the marshal, and the three proceeded to the shady corner, on the main street, where the arrest of the Jew promptly followed.

The lights still blazed in the saloons and gambling houses—though everything except the night-hawks had retired—when the form of a man slipped forward through the darkness toward the little jail.

It was the form of Emerald Green. The silk

tile was replaced by a soft felt hat, which was drawn far over his face as a disguise.

As he neared the building he removed the covering from some small object which he carried in his hand.

Not a sound came from the building to indicate that it was occupied.

"Perhaps the fellow is asleep!" he muttered.

"So much the better, if he is!"

He stooped to the earth and crept carefully to the rear of the jail.

The building rested on stone pillars and the strong floor was at least two feet above the ground.

Under this floor crept the midnight prowler. When he had reached the center he stopped, and placed the article he carried carefully upon the ground.

Then he struck a match, taking particular pains to so hold it that no passer-by could see its light.

The blaze illuminated a small circle in front of him, and revealed the fact that the mysterious object was a dynamite bomb, having a clock-work attachment by which it could be exploded.

"I'll set the thing so that it will not explode for thirty minutes!" he said to himself, as calmly as if he were not contemplating deliberate murder. "This will give me time to mingle with the boys in such a way that no one will ever dream that I had a hand in the thing!"

He started the clock-work, arranging it so that the bomb would be fired in thirty minutes. Then he threw down the burnt-out match, crept from beneath the building and wriggled away through the grass like some foul reptile.

It was his intention to proceed at once to some saloon and there await the explosion. But his intense anxiety and curiosity overcame this prudent resolve. When he had reached a safe distance he halted to look back at the dark building, beneath which the devilish clock-work was ticking off the fatal minutes.

As he looked, the terrible fascination of the foul crime contemplated, chained him to the spot. He took out his watch, held it in his hand, and proceeded to count the seconds.

While thus engaged, another dark form, crouching low to avoid observation, approached the little jail. Emerald did not see this dark form, and had no thought that another would-be assassin was lurking near.

The man approached the rear of the building, shovved some articles in front of him and crept quietly after.

"It will not be a difficult matter to cut through this floor. Brentwood is no doubt asleep by this time."

It was the low voice of Saffron Sol.

He produced a delicate saw and some cutting instruments and began a careful examination of the floor.

"An easy trick to cut through there!" he muttered. "And I can do the job so lightly that it wouldn't wake a cat. Ghost or no ghost, that infernal detective won't escape me this time. There may have been some mistake about that bullet, but if I put a knife into him he'll not walk around again, unless he really is a spirit."

Saffron Sol stopped and glared around inquisitorily. The ticking of the clock-work had come to his ears.

"What's that?" he questioned hoarsely.

If his sallow face could have been observed, it would have been seen that it had taken on a ghastly, sickly hue. His hands shook and a craven fear took possession of him.

As he listened to the steady ticking he became almost palsied with fright.

"It must be a time bomb!" he muttered. "If so, I will be killed before I can get out of here!"

"Ah!"

He gave a great gasp, as a new idea came to him.

"Maybe some drunken fool has crawled under here and it's his watch that I hear. It must be, for who would want to blow up the jail?"

He extracted a match from his pocket and proceeded to strike it, with an unsteady hand.

As it flared up, the bomb lay plainly revealed, almost at his feet.

He could not repress a cry; and his hand shook so that the match fell from it and was extinguished.

"The thing will explode before I can get out of here!" he exclaimed, in a horrified tone, at the same time fumbling for another match. "I must stop that clock-work!"

He struck this second match and as its flame broke through the darkness, he seized the hammer that hung poised over the bomb and wrenched it from its fastening.

"There!" he murmured, with a breath of relief, as he sunk back exhausted, and almost fainting, while the expiring match fell from his nerveless fingers. "Five seconds more and I would have been blown into eternity!"

The whispered words were almost gurgled, so great had been his fright and excitement.

"Now, the question arises, *why* was that bomb placed under here?"

The danger past, he was growing cooler, and so natural a query could not fail to come uppermost in his mind.

He could not answer it satisfactorily. He was about to abandon his project of cutting through the floor, and beat a retreat, when a form appeared in the dim light at the opening by which he had gained entrance.

It was Emerald Green, who had seen the flickering match and now came to investigate. He had waited until the ticking of his watch had informed him that the time for the explosion had more than passed, and he determined to learn the cause of the failure.

He believed it to be due to an accomplice of the Jew, for the latter could scarcely get through that heavy floor. Besides no sounds had come to indicate that the Jew was aware of his peril.

Saffron Sol crouched low and held his breath in suspense.

"Who is under there?" demanded Emerald, speaking in a guarded tone.

There was no reply.

"Speak out, or I will open fire!" he cried, raising his voice. "There is some one under there. I saw the light, and I will fill you full of holes, if you don't speak up!"

The answer was a shot from the revolver of Saffron Sol; and the sport staggered back as if hit.

He was not touched, however, and began firing back at the concealed man.

"Jupiter! that won't do!" he cried, "I may hit the bomb, and we'll all be killed together. No, I must get assistance."

He raised his voice in a cry for help, and the gamblers who had already been drawn into the streets by the firing, came running toward him.

"Send for the mayor and marshal!" was his command. "There is a man under there who has been trying to release the prisoners."

CHAPTER III.

SAFFRON SOL'S DEFIANCE.

A COUPLE of men darted away to summon those city officials; and Emerald began a hurried explanation of how he came to discover the presence of the concealed man.

Saffron Sol did not stop to listen to this manufactured explanation. He thought only of flight, and commenced to look carefully about to see if there was not some way by which he might escape.

The building was raised from the ground upon all sides, but the aperture at the rear was by far the largest. At the front the ground had been cut away to obtain a level, and there the pillars supporting the structure almost touched the earth.

Yet it was the only way by which escape seemed possible, the other wall of the jail being closely watched by the men who had come forward at Emerald's call.

He had a hatchet among the tools he had brought, and Sol was not long in deciding that his route to freedom lay by way of the front.

It was the work of only a few minutes to excavate enough earth to permit the passage of his body. Cautiously he crept through, then crouched low and peered about in the darkness. The way seemed clear.

Not wishing to abandon his tools he thrust his head and shoulders again under the building and proceeded to draw them out. He did not forget the dynamite bomb, but drew it out also, handling it as carefully as if it had been an egg.

The time lost in these operations resulted disastrously.

As he emerged from the building, with the bomb in his hands, the mayor and marshal dashed around the corner.

"Hyer he is!" cried the mayor, seizing him by the heels and dragging him bodily into the street. "Hyer's the scoundrel that's been tryin' to let out that sneakin' Jew."

But Saffron Sol did not intend to be taken in that manner. He drew back one foot and gave the mayor such a stunning and blinding kick in the face that the latter went over backward, with a howl of pain.

Before the marshal could lay hold of him. Saffron bounded to his feet, and made an attempt at flight. This was prevented by Emerald Green and his followers.

Knowing by the noise in front that important

events were there transpiring, they streamed around the corners of the jail, thus effectually preventing a dash in either of those directions.

The marshal, with drawn revolver, barred the way to the street, and the hunted man seemed doomed to capture.

Quick as a flash one hand swept to his face. When it dropped again at his side, his features were concealed by a mask, through the holes of which his eyes glared like twin coals of fire. No one had yet recognized him and he evidently did not intend they should.

Raising the deadly bomb high in the air, he cried desperately, in a high-keyed and assumed voice:

"Back, every one of you! This is a dynamite bomb that I hold in my hand, and so sure as you press me I will hurl it into your midst, if I die for it the next minute!"

There was one in the throng who knew that he spoke the truth, in regard to the possession of the bomb. That one was Emerald Green; and the agility and quickness with which he retreated from the dangerous locality would have done credit to an athlete.

The others, startled by the threat, followed Emerald's example.

"Who air you, anyway?" thundered the marshal, producing a bull's-eye lantern and flashing its light upon the masked face.

A horrible gurgling laugh came from behind the mask.

"I am a man who cares no more for his life than the turning of a card. There is a shadow on my past that gives me no rest, day or night. That shadow, gentlemen, has driven me to the verge of madness. Sometimes I want to live and sometimes death seems as alluring as life. To-night is one of my reckless times: and I would as soon die by this bomb as in any other way!

"Once again I give you warning. If you crowd me, I will hurl it into your midst."

"Down with him!" shouted Grizzly Martin, drawing a revolver.

"Shoot, gentlemen, if you will!" Saffron Sol replied, quite calmly, but in the same disguised voice. "If you do, however, you must know that this bomb will fall upon the stones at my feet. I may go first; but I can assure you that you will overtake me before I am far on my journey."

His coolness and calmness awed the turbulent men into silence. None of them cared to be hurled so unceremoniously into eternity.

"I will have to arrest you!" declared the marshal, sternly. "You have been tryin' to release the Jew, and we can't stand no sech racket as that."

"Take me, if you dare!" Saffron cried, backing slowly toward the opening, which had been left by Emerald and his adherents when they retreated.

"I had no wish to aid the Jew to escape. On the contrary, I assure you that I came here with the intention of killing him! It seems that some one else had similar intentions; for when I crawled under the jail to cut my way to him, I found this bomb, so arranged that it would have exploded in a very few seconds."

All this time he had continued his slow retrogression, and had now passed the corner of the building.

Emerald Green, with his backers, was upon that side; but the Irishman was too well aware of the deadly nature of that missile to attempt to crowd the reckless man who held it.

"Stop him, over there!" yelled the marshal. "He'll git away in a minute more."

"Stop him yourself!" answered one of the sports. "Do you think I want my head blown off with that thing?"

"Fair warning!" shrieked Saffron, as he frenziedly swung the terrible bomb about his head. "I tell you I will not be taken! If you push me you must take the consequences. If I throw this bomb at your feet, there will not be a man of you left alive to tell the tale!"

He continued to back slowly away, shouting his warnings and swinging the bomb.

"I don't b'lieve he's got any dynamite!" called out the marshal. "I don't propose to let any man walk off from me that way. That's a game of bluff. I'll risk it, anyhow; so, hyer goes!"

He lifted his revolver as he spoke.

"Do you want to kill us all?" cried Emerald, leaping to the officer's side and wresting the revolver from his hand. "We're not ready to die yet, even if you are. I feel sure the fellow is telling the truth, and he's just desperate enough to do as he says."

The excited crowd surged for a moment around Emerald Green and the marshal.

Taking advantage of the opportunity thus offered, Saffron Sol dashed around the building and ran for the nearest alley.

"There he goes!" howled the marshal, enraged at the escape of the man in disguise. "I don't b'lieve he's got a bomb; an' if you'd a' kep' your hands off o' me, I'd a' downed him."

He wrested himself from Emerald's detaining grasp and darted in pursuit, the excited mob streaming along at his heels.

By this time Sol had reached the alley, up which he dashed with surprising speed. Believing that the town was becoming aroused, and that if he continued his flight, he would be captured before he reached the plains beyond, he darted into the rear of a livery stable.

Here he transferred the mask and the bomb to the pockets of his coat.

At that moment the marshal hurried by, followed by the howling mob. When they had passed, he hastened after them.

"What's up?" he cried, in his natural tone of voice, as he overtook the hindmost.

"After a murderin' galoot that's gone up this 'ere way!" was the answer.

"Is that so?" Saffron exclaimed. "Who did he kill?"

The man explained the situation, as Saffron ran along at his side.

"A singular case!" declared Saffron. "We must find the fellow and get something more of an explanation out of him."

He became at once one of the most industrious of the beaters; and remained with the party until morning, when the search was given over as useless.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSENTHAL OPENS A SHOP.

WHAT of the Jew during this time of confusion?

He had taken matters quite coolly when placed in the jail, knowing that protestations would be useless.

No provision was made for supplying him with food and drink; but he appeared not to mind this in the least. When night came he unrolled his pack and extracted some eatables that, from the manner in which he devoured them, seemed quite palatable.

He also drew a blanket from the pack. Placing one of his boots under his head for a pillow, he stretched his form at length on the blanket, apparently having neither care nor fear for the future.

He was first aroused by the pistol-shot fired by Saffron Sol from beneath the building. If he had been sleeping, he was now, at least, wide awake.

"Ach! mein Gott!" he exclaimed, in a low tone, sitting bolt upright.

The shot was answered by one from Emerald, causing the Jew to shift his position uneasily.

He quickly comprehended from the words that some one had been attempting to gain an entrance to the jail; and he shuddered slightly as he learned that the man held a dynamite bomb in his hand.

He was keenly alive to the exciting events that followed; and listened eagerly to every word that was uttered.

Fearing that an attempt might be made to break in the jail door, he drew a revolver from some place of concealment and held it in readiness to repel an attack.

He replaced it, with a sigh of relief, as the mob rolled away in pursuit of Saffron Sol.

When the marshal visited him, in the early hours of the morning, he was apparently sleeping as peacefully as an infant.

"Vot vas dose rakkeds apout outside de chail last night?" he asked, opening his eyes and yawning heavily.

"Somebody tried to blow ye up with dynamite!" replied the marshal.

"Oh, mine gootness! Vos dot so?"

He leaped to his feet excitedly, and stared at the officer in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Vot vor vos dot, eh?"

"Don't know; and hain't got time to answer questions, now! Hyer's some grub; and some water in this tin-cup. Eat yer fill, fer you'll have to appear before the mare in about an hour from now."

The Jew was eating greedily, before the marshal had finished talking, seeming to have no wish beyond satisfying his hunger and thirst.

At about the same time, Emerald Green was closeted with the mayor.

The young Irishman was greatly excited over the events of the night.

"I tell you, Grizzly," he was saying, "it won't do to let that Jew hang around here. He is dangerous! and, as you can see yourself, he has

confederates. He must either be killed or run out of the town!"

Martin had been combating the idea that the Jew was a detective.

"Well, how air you a-goin' to do it?" the mayor asked, doggedly. "I think myself, that your're away off. That Jew seems to me jest what he looks to be. How air you a-goin' to prove that he ain't?"

"And then, even if he ain't the clean, white artikel, how will you git the people of Eli to believe you? You must recollect that there air a good many square men in this town. And then, the town company wouldn't allow no roots to be played onto a feller. They're a-tryin' to induce men to move in hyer an' settle up the country. What makes you so everlastin' certain the chap's a detective, anyway?"

Emerald did not care to answer this question, and so ignored it by asking another:

"Couldn't you hold him in jail another night? I'd guarantee to lay him out if I had another opportunity."

"Couldn't do it 'thout losin' my place!" answered Grizzly, with a shake of his head. "I am holdin' him a little irreg'lar now, but nobody'll kick as long as I pretend it's fer the perfection of our home trade. But, I can't hold him forever on a little thing like that. And besides, I don't like that bomb business you was a-tryin' to work last night."

"Well, something must be done! If it isn't, I tell you, Grizzly, you're not only likely to lose your position, but you'll lose your life."

Martin laughed.

"You're excited, Emerald; that's all. You allow your head-piece to git away with you. Not that you ain't got sense; for you have. But your imagination's been r'iled up so't you can't see anything straight."

"Enough of this!" Emerald exclaimed, rising somewhat angrily. "You will find, when it's too late, that I am right in the matter. Do you propose to do anything, or do you not?"

"Well, yes! I'll have the Jew brought before me in a little while; and then I'll fine him so that he'll be glad to git out o' the country."

"The old fool!" Emerald exclaimed, when he had gained the street. "I couldn't tell him why I am so sure of my man. That wouldn't do at all. Grizzly knows what I am here, and that knowledge is black enough. I don't care to tell him what I have been in the past."

An hour later, the Jew was ushered into the little office occupied by the mayor.

"You're accused o' peddin' goods without a license, my friend!" said the mayor, assuming a magisterial air. "What's your name?"

"Moses Rosenthal!" replied the Jew, promptly enough.

"Well, Mr. Rosenthal, you must know that anything o' that kind can't be allowed in this hyer town. Our merchants pays an occupation tax; and you will see yerself that it wouldn't be right to allow outsiders to come in and take away their business."

"Now, ef you think you will move on and not repeat the offense, why, I'll be kinder light on you. Otherwise I'll have to sock it to you ruther heavy."

A number of spectators had dropped in; and Grizzly was wise enough to see that the use of harsh words would be poor policy.

The Jew also recognized the advantage which the presence of the spectators afforded him.

"How mooth apout vos dose oggubation daxes? Dis vos a poody goot down vor pizness, I dinks me."

"You'd better move on!" Grizzly answered, with a frown. "The boys don't like the looks o' certain things that happened last night; and, in consekence, the place ain't likely to be healthy fer you."

Noticing that there was a dogged look on the Jew's face, and that he seemed to have no intention of accepting this extra-judicial advice, the mayor promptly imposed a heavy fine.

"And you kin go to jail until it's paid!" he added, savagely.

To his surprise and disgust the Jew drew out a well-filled wallet, paid the fine without protestation, and asked for an occupation permit.

A glance over the faces of the spectators showed that they rather relished the Israelite's grit.

"I dinks me dot I vill sday in dis down. Id vos a poody goot down, und id vos named like mine grandfodder. I haf more as a t'ousand tollars vort' of clodings und chewelry in dot back; und uff I gan't zell id mitoud going reck'lar indo de pizness, vhy, den I goes reck'lar indo de pizness."

In vain did the mayor try to induce him, by argument, to leave the town. He dared not be

harsh, or attempt severe measures in the presence of those disinterested spectators.

"Well, I'll make out yer license!" he said, finally, in hot anger. "But I warn you that I can't be responsible fer anything that may happen to any shanty that you may move into."

He hoped that no one would rent the Jew a place in which to conduct business, after that warning. But he was doomed to disappointment. The Jew's money unlocked a very commodious room on the main street; and the next day Rosenthal announced to the citizens of Eli that he had opened a shop.

CHAPTER V.

THE EMERALD TIGERS.

TWENTY miles from Eli there is a cedar gorge. An irregular cavern of considerable extent opens into it from the bluffs. The scrubby cedars and low-growing bushes so conceal the mouth of this cavern that it would require a close search for any one unacquainted with the place to find it.

On the afternoon succeeding the bomb excitement, a dozen well-armed horsemen filed slowly into the gorge, at a point about a mile above the secret cavern.

They had come from the plains to the westward. They were a villainous-looking crew, mounted on strong, wiry ponies. In their midst was a boy of ten, bound and blindfolded. There were traces of tears on his face, and his wretched and terror-stricken appearance would have appealed to any heart not wholly composed of stone.

"That war a good haul we made!" said the hatchet-faced leader, addressing one of his subordinates, and jerking his thumb toward the boy. "Ef the boss ain't pleased with that, 'tain't no use tryin' to please 'im. That kid's worth five thousand dollars to us. Givin' the boss five hundred, which is his tenth int'rast, that'll still leave a big pile fer us to divvy."

"Ole Ben Williamson'll be jest ro'rin', fightin' mad when he gits back to his ranch and finds his kid gone. But I calc'late he'll come down handsome, ef the boss'll jest write him a perlite note, sayin' t' the kid's where he can't never find 'im, an' that ef he ever wants to see 'im ag'in, he must come down with the stamps, and ax no questions."

"A thing like that'll fetch the best of 'em. Williamson 'ud sell ev'ry huff he's got to save that boy."

The hatchet-faced scoundrel indulged in a hard, metallic cackle, which he intended for a laugh, and in which his subordinate obediently joined.

They had been on a general raid to the westward, in search of anything that they could turn into money, without too much danger to themselves. Finding that Williamson was away from his ranch with all his herders, they masked themselves and rode fearlessly up to the ranch-house.

The negro cook and little Robbie Williamson, the ranchman's son, were alone upon the place.

The sight of these masked riders, who seemed to have sprung so mysteriously out of the ground, frightened the old negro half out of his senses.

"Doan' kill us, boss! Doan' kill us, an' we'll do whatever you axes us to."

The negro lifted his hands imploringly, while Robbie clung, sobbing, to his knees.

"Shet up yer yawp!" was the brutal answer. "We'll take the boy, but we don't care anything fer you."

"Oh, boss, doan' take de boy! Take de pore ole nigger what ain't good fur nuffin'; but doan' take ole master's boy!"

He drew the boy to him and tried to shield him in his arms.

A savage blow in the face was the response to this pathetic appeal; and before he could rise he was set upon by some of the heartless wretches and securely bound and gagged.

Leaving him thus, they seized the boy, hurried to their horses and galloped rapidly away.

As they descended into the gorge, a man rode from among the scrubby thickets and advanced to meet them. It was Emerald Green.

"What have you got there?" he asked, scarcely noticing the awkward salute given by the hatchet-faced man. He was evidently nervous and ill at ease.

"You'll get us into trouble, Bunk Darby!" he exclaimed, with a frown, when his question had been fully and satisfactorily answered. "We can't afford to take such risks. Rustling stock and the road-agent racket is about all we ought to try to attend to."

"But look at the money in the thing!" argued Darby. "Why, boss, Williamson 'll come down

with five thousand dollars to git that boy out o' our han's. I'm shore of it. And I can't see as it's any more dangerous than the t'other things you mention."

"Perhaps not!" Emerald answered, with a troubled look. "But I came down to-day expressly to warn you of the peril that is now hanging over the Emerald Tigers. I intended to tell you to hold up and do nothing until you had further orders from me."

He had paid no heed to the pitiable condition of the boy, showing that he was as heartless and lacking in feeling as the tigers of the jungle, after which he called his band.

The Tigers crowded around him for an explanation of his mysterious words; and he detailed to them at length the events with which the reader is acquainted.

"Now, I am satisfied," he said, after concluding the narration, "that this detective is here for the express purpose of hunting us down. I know it! I have seen the man before. His name is Bob Brentwood, and he is a regular bloodhound on the trail."

"So you can see why I am sorry you took the boy. It will raise a fresh hue and cry against us, and may give Brentwood some dangerous points. If he leagues himself with old Ben Williamson they will be likely to make it mighty hot for us. Williamson has the money and Brentwood has the pluck and brains."

"Ef they crowd us, we kin cut the kid's throat!"

The desperate look of a hunted wolf crept into Darby's evil face, as he said this.

"Don't you dare do anything of the kind, Darby!" Emerald exclaimed, almost fiercely. "Do you want to put a rope around the neck of every one of us? That's what you'd do! The earth wouldn't be big enough to hold us if we killed Ben Williamson's son. Money would be poured out like water, and there would be a dozen detectives on every man's track inside of a month. No! don't do that, Darby, unless you're getting wonderfully tired of living; which I don't think is the case."

"Why can't we git this hyer ransom I was speakin' about, an' then give the country the shake?" asked the hatchet-faced ruffian, watching the troubled look in his master's eyes.

"Perhaps we can!" Emerald replied, thoughtfully. "I will see—"

"There's a hull wheen o' fellers comin' round the bend yender!" shouted one of the Tigers, excitedly.

"It's ole Ben Williamson an' his cowboys!" cried Bunk Darby, as he straightened up in his saddle and stared at the still-distant but rapidly-approaching horsemen. "How he found the thing out so quick is what gits me. He hain't had time to trail us hyer frum the ranch."

"It won't do any good to run!" said Emerald. "They've seen us, and are coming end-on. You fellows were disguised when you got the boy, I suppose?"

"You bet!"

"Then he can't know certain that we're the men, if he hasn't trailed us. Hustle that boy to the cave as quick as you can; and I'll see what a slick tongue can do toward throwing him off the scent."

The boy commenced to scream and shout, as he heard this command, with the hope of attracting the attention of his father.

"Shet up!" cried Darby, dragging him hastily from the horse. "Ef you make us too much trouble, I'll slit yer weasen anyway, an' take the chances."

This savage threat did not silence the little fellow, for he continued his cries and struggles until stricken into insensibility by a blow from Darby's heavy fist.

"Now, h'ist him to the cave!" he commanded.

Two men grasped the limp form and hurried with it into the concealment afforded by the low-growing cedars.

"They are too far away to have seen that!" Emerald observed, mounting a stone. "Now for some theatricals!"

"We're a lot of boomers, you understand, holding a secret meeting. You're horny-handed sons of toil, or at least you want to be, and I'm a slick citizen from Eli, haranguing you in regard to the glorious agricultural possibilities of this country. Such meetings are being held every week, and we might as well hold one as anybody."

"It's the duty of Congress to open this country for settlement and no longer allow it to remain simply a place of refuge for evil men. We have petitioned that honorable body to take some action in the matter, and we believe such action will be taken, at an early day. Therefore, we, the first-comers to this country, must band to-

gether to protect ourselves in our individual rights.

"We are only squatters to-day, but to-morrow we may be claim-holders, fully recognized and protected by the Government. As soon as the telegraph carries the news that the country known as the Neutral Strip, Cimarron and No Man's Land, has been opened to settlers, thousands of men will at once flock in here."

"First come first served, is the rule at a Land Office. Others may file on the claims we have picked out for ourselves, and we will have no redress except by the strong arm of might. Therefore we must organize and stand by each other. Friends, you 'ketch on?'

He drew from his pockets a sectional map of the country and a copy of the constitution and by-laws adopted by the men calling themselves "boomers," and at once launched into a speech which would have seemed the genuine article to one unacquainted with the case.

In this strain he was pouring forth when Williamson and his cowboys clattered down the gorge.

"Glad to see you! We're holding a quiet boomer meeting; and no doubt you're interested in the subject."

He paused only long enough to say this; and then hurried on with his address.

Williamson looked at the crowd with an angry and suspicious eye.

"I hain't much use for chaps that are always trying to set the country afire with their talk!" he cried, scornfully.

Emerald paused, as if dumfounded.

"No there's too much of that always going on. If you'll hold your tongue a bit, I'd like to put in a word."

"Certainly!" Emerald replied quite smoothly, seating himself upon the stone.

"One o' my cowboys went to the ranch a few hours ago and found my nigger cook tied up and my boy gone!" said Williamson, hotly, launching at once into the subject. "The chaps that did it come this way; and when I got the news I headed straight across the country, expectin' to strike them or their trail."

"I hain't seen anybody but you; and as it is about where they ought to be, *I believe you are the men!*"

He whipped out his revolver, as he spoke, and his example was followed by the cowboys.

The discussion that followed was hot and bitter.

"If we're the men you're after," said Emerald, finally, "*where is the boy?*"

"You've hid him somewhere, curse you!" shouted the frenzied father.

"I live at Eli!" Emerald replied, putting on a bold front. "I am well known there; and you have seen me in the place frequently. I have not seen your boy. Make all the search you want to; and if you think I am not telling the truth you know where to find me at any time."

A search was begun and carried out in as systematic a manner as possible. Nothing was discovered, however, and Williamson, half-frantic from rage and grief, was at last forced to ride away.

But it was with a threat on his lips:

"I know you, Emerald Green, and I know that you are no better than you ought to be. If a hair of my boy's head is harmed, and I find that you had a hand in it, I will have you hung for it, if it costs me my last dollar and forty lives!"

CHAPTER VI.

"THE SQUATTER'S REST."

THE shop of Moses Rosenthal, the Jew, adjoined one of the most notorious saloons in the town of Eli.

The proprietor of the saloon was a Missourian named Gabriel Crane, and his long legs, long neck, and beak-like nose gave to his figure a fancied resemblance to the bird whose name he bore.

He had named the saloon "The Squatter's Rest," and it was one of Emerald Green's favorite resorts.

During the night after the events chronicled in the preceding chapter, or rather during the early hours of the morning of the next day, the young Irishman paid a stealthy visit to this saloon.

A shadow crept softly along behind him, and if the darkness had not been so intense the shadow would have stood revealed as Rosenthal, the Jew.

Emerald proceeded to a little room in which a lamp was dimly burning, carefully unlocking and locking each door through which he passed. And behind him, like the shadow he seemed, crept the Jew, also unlocking and locking the

doors, and imitating the Irishman's every movement.

When Emerald gained the room, the Jew crouched in front of the door and applied one eye to the keyhole.

In addition to Emerald, the room contained Grizzly Martin, the mayor, and Gabriel Crane, the saloon-keeper.

"I thought I would find you here," said Emerald, helping himself to a chair, "and I also thought it best to come in without making any noise, as I have something important to communicate, which I don't care to publish to the world."

"Found out anything cert'in about that Jew?" asked Grizzly, pushing back from the table.

"No, I haven't," with a light laugh. "No more than I know already—that he's a detective. A fact you'll discover also, sooner or later."

"I'm just in from the lair of the Tigers, and I came to tell you that I'm afraid we're to have old Ben Williamson on top of our backs, as well as this Jew."

Having thus opened the subject, he plunged into it rapidly, detailing and explaining everything that had occurred.

"You see it puts me in bad shape, if Williamson should discover anything. I had a notion at first to turn the boy loose on the prairie. But, after thinking it over, I concluded that that wouldn't keep Williamson from proceeding with his search;—and then, I would like to assist in handling that little chunk of ransom money."

"So I ordered the boys to conceal the trail they had left. Then make another, coming from the opposite direction; and scatter, as if they had left the boomer meeting in little squads. The boy is safe in the cave and well guarded. I pulled the wool over Williamson's eyes rather handsome—suspicious as he is—and I dare say he don't dream that he was within less than a mile of where his boy is hidden."

"In the morning I intend to write him a note, which I shall date from somewhere in the Panhandle country, telling him he can have his boy if he will come down with the proper amount of dust."

The Jew waited to hear no more; but left the building as he had entered it, and stole softly to his shop.

He emerged a little later, went to the stable where he kept a horse he had bought since entering the town, and rode through a dark alley to the open plains.

Once out of the town he put spurs to his horse and dashed rapidly away, heading toward Williamson's ranch, many miles distant.

As the sun came up out of the broad, prairie-like expanse, he noticed a horseman riding across the country at an acute angle to the direction he was pursuing.

He could see the man quite plainly. His form seemed slightly familiar and he judged he had noticed him on the streets of Eli. There was nothing in the appearance of the unknown horseman to suggest peril to himself; and the Jew scarcely gave him a passing thought.

If accosted by the man he intended to state that he was on his way to an adjoining town on a business errand.

After a little, the man and horse disappeared in a gully;—quite a natural occurrence in a country cut up by ravines.

Rosenthal rode straight on, his mind busy with the information he had gained at the Squatter's Rest.

When within fifty yards of the gully, a jet of flame leaped from the grass along its edges. The Jew tumbled helplessly from his horse; and the terror-stricken animal dashed madly away.

"I thought that shot would fetch him!" said Saffron Sol, getting up from the grass in which he had concealed himself, and "pumping" another cartridge into the barrel of his Winchester.

His face was flushed and feverish, and he pushed the damp hair back from his brows with a shaking hand. His bloodshot eyes rolled in their deep sockets in a ghastly way, and he licked his lips as if they were parched with thirst.

"Yes, I thought that would fetch him," he continued. "That's the second time I have killed Bob Brentwood. He wouldn't stay dead when I shot him through the heart; so this time I tried his head."

"I had no thought of seeing him out here this morning. But no doubt it's a good omen. Anyway it was a good opportunity. Entirely too good to be thrown away. He is dead this time, without any question, for I had a fair view of his head, and he fell like a log. The coyotes

will pick his bones and no one will know that I had a hand in it.

"No one! Oh, that I could shut out from my mind that fear of a God!"

"I will shut it out!" stamping furiously on the ground. "Yes; I will! I will! There is no hereafter! I deny it! It's all a lie of the drivel ing preachers, who are too lazy to work and take that means of frightening people into supporting them. When a man dies, he dies! Yes, he dies!"

The last words were almost a wail.

"No! I can't look on Bob Brentwood's face. It would kill me! I am a double murderer! I have killed him twice. Yes; twice!"

He could remain there no longer. He leaped upon his horse and dashed furiously away.

A few minutes after the stricken Jew moved uneasily and muttered some incoherent words. A little later he raised himself to a sitting posture and stared about in a mystified way.

He passed his hand to his head, which was bleeding profusely.

"I have been shot!" he muttered, the words showing no trace of the Jew dialect. "How did it happen? Yes; I remember. A man rode into the ravine. There was a flash, and I knew no more. My head feels as if it would split."

He ran his fingers through his hair and carefully examined the furrow which the bullet had plowed.

"A close call, that!" he exclaimed. "I must manage to tie it up, for I am losing altogether too much blood."

He took cut his red bandanna and wound it around his head in such a way that the flow of blood was very much lessened.

Then he tried to gain his feet, but the earth seemed to swim beneath him and he sunk back, his face looking ghastly and drawn.

"Too weak!" he murmured, with an attempt at a smile. "I thought I saw a cabin off to the right, before that fellow downed me. I might reach it, if I had my horse."

"I wonder who fired that shot anyway. It must have been one of Emerald Green's Tigers. That seems hardly probable, though; for I am certain Green didn't know I had left the town. Even if he knew it, he couldn't have got a man out here on such short notice."

"The whole affair has a singular look. If the fellow was ordered to kill me, why didn't he finish what he had so well begun?"

For an hour he sat there, pondering over the mystery, his strength gradually coming back to him, as the minutes fled.

At last he dragged himself to his feet, and catching a glimpse of the cabin, staggered heavily toward it.

He had not proceeded far, in this uncertain, painful manner, until he saw a young woman, coming toward him, leading his horse.

Seeing that she had noticed him, he waved his hands and again sunk to the ground; for he was as weak as a child.

As he slipped down out of sight in that limp, helpless fashion, the young woman mounted to the heavy saddle and hurried the animal forward.

"Ah! dot vos mosd eggsellent in you, my tear!" he said, as she cantered lightly up to where he lay

CHAPTER VII.

BONNIE BETTY MORGAN.

"YOU are hurt?" the young woman asked, springing to the ground and hastening to him.

"Yes; I vos shooded py some yellow vrom ould dot raween. Dot pullet towned me like I vos peen a brairie chicken."

"I saw your horse wandering around; and as he was saddled and bridled, I concluded that something had happened to his rider."

The voice was musical, and the fresh, young face of the girl glowed with interest.

"The horse seemed lost and uncertain what to do; and I finally went out to him."

"There was a speck of blood on the saddle; and I felt sure, then, that the rider had been hurt. So I commenced trailing the horse back by the way he had come. When I saw you I knew you were the individual I was seeking."

"I musd t'ank you very mooch, my tear!" said the supposed Jew. "I vos nod in a cordition to walk. I vos dryng to reach dot house vot I see agross de brairie. My name is Moses Rosenthal and I am a stranher in dis gountry. I haf a shob obened in Eli, bud I vos not peen dhere more as a few tays."

"Can I assist you in any way?" she asked.

"I am Betty Morgan, the daughter of Robert Morgan, the squatter. That is our house which you were trying to reach. Father is not at

home, but I am expecting him at any time. You are welcome to such accommodations as our little home affords."

Rosenthal listened to her gracious voice, with a kindling glance.

"I shall pe mosd habby do agecpd your shenerous hosbitality!" he replied. "Maype some dime I gan redurn de vafor!"

"Can't I help you into the saddle?" she inquired anxiously, as she looked at his white face.

"Id is not var; und I am poody heafy. Uff you vill leat de horse, I dink dot I gan ged along py bolting py de sattle."

She realized the difficulty, if not impossibility of lifting the Jew to the back of the horse; and therefore did as requested. With the sustaining aid of the saddle, Rosenthal was able to get over the ground with comparative ease. Their progress was slow, however, and it took them almost an hour to reach the house.

It was a stoutly-built cabin, made of cedar logs brought from the distant gorges. It contained two rooms, and one of these Betty placed at his disposal.

After his wound had been properly dressed, he coiled up on a little pallet and quickly fell asleep.

When he awoke, at noon, Morgan had not returned. Rosenthal was much stronger, but he feared his strength would no be sufficient to enable him to reach Williamson's ranch. He had intended to hire Morgan to convey a letter there for him.

It was very important that word should be got to Williamson without delay, and he chafed and fretted at his inability to do anything.

Finally he resolved to take Betty into his confidence. He could hear her singing cheerily about in the other room. Her voice was low and sweet. It was a confidence-inspiring voice; and Rosenthal felt that he could safely trust the possessor of such a voice with his life.

Her sympathetic nature and her cheerfulness had deeply impressed him. This song-bird of the mirage-haunted plains certainly had the loveliness of face and the kindness of disposition which he wished the woman who should become his wife to possess.

After pondering the subject deeply, he called her into the room, partially removed his disguises, and revealed himself to her in his true character. He also endeavored to impress strongly upon her mind the importance of getting early word to Williamson.

"Those Tigers are all desperate men, Miss Morgan," he continued, "and their leader, Emerald Green, hasn't half the mercy possessed by his prototype of the Indian jungles. My fear is that they may kill the boy, to prevent his discovery."

"I can convey the information!" was the instant rejoinder. "I am a fairly good horsewoman and well acquainted with the country. There is a horse in the stable that will take me to the ranch by dark."

"I knew that would be your answer!" he replied, proudly. "I intended to try to get your father to carry the word, but his continued absence—"

"Father is not always as reliable as he should be!" she answered, with a slight flush. "I am sorry to have to say so, but you will discover it sooner or later."

Seeing that he was trenching on disagreeable ground, he deftly changed the subject.

Betty at once began preparations for her journey. A hasty dinner was prepared and eaten—such delicacies as the cabin afforded being brought out for the wounded guest. A pitcher of cool well water was placed in his room. Then the horse was saddled and bridled; and she rode rapidly away across the wide plains, followed by the detective's encouraging words and looks.

"There goes as fine a girl as I've met in many a day!" was his mental comment, as he watched her out of sight. "And as handsome!"

That Betty Morgan was a skillful horsewoman was evidenced by the ease and grace with which she sat in the saddle, and by the manner in which she handled the bridle-rein and tiny, braided quirt.

The prairie before her was almost a dead level, intersected occasionally by a dry gully or a ravine. Over such a country a good horse will travel many miles in a day, if the rider is careful to husband the strength of his steed.

Williamson's Ranch lay far up the North Fork of the Canadian, a long day's journey from the town of Eli. Yet Betty Morgan knew the strength and spirit of the horse she rode, and believed she could reach the ranch by nightfall.

Her thoughts, as she skimmed swiftly over

the short and moss-like buffalo-grass, were of the bitter-sweet order.

The thoughts of the stranger, who had so singularly come into her home and life, were pleasant. She had believed him to be a coarse and greasy fellow, and he had revealed himself as uncommonly prepossessing and intelligent. The ingenuousness of his glance convinced her that the story he told was entirely true.

She could not remember that she had ever seen Mr. Williamson; but her heart went out in sympathy for the stricken man, who had been so cruelly and foully bereft of his only son.

Emerald Green, she knew, hated and feared. He had visited the Morgan home on several occasions, but always in company with her father. At such times he had stared and leered at her in a way to make her blood run cold. She instinctively knew him to be a bad and vicious man; and so she disliked and feared him.

As for her father, his great, besetting sin, so far as she was aware, was an extreme fondness for strong drink. He was seldom harsh or quarrelsome. As a general thing he treated her kindly, even when in his cups; but she could not control the sense of disgust and loathing which his condition, at such times, wrought in her feelings. She tried dutifully to love him, as a father, but she could scarcely bring herself to be a drunken and disgusting sot. Love, even filial love, cannot be coaxed nor driven; it must be won.

The shadows were beginning to thicken when she reached Williamson's ranch.

Luckily Williamson and his cowboys were at home. They had spent the entire day in the search and had just returned, discouraged at their lack of success.

Williamson was almost heart-broken. The missing boy was his idol. Without him life seemed not worth the living. He had lost a daughter many years before, in the same mysterious manner. The old wound, thus reopened, added its pain to that of the new.

Betty Morgan was not long in acquainting Williamson with the nature of her errand. She did not know the exact location of the lair of the Tigers. Her instructions were to have Williamson join the detective, with his force of cowboys. Then the detective would lead them to the secret rendezvous.

Williamson's anger knew no bounds when he learned that Emerald Green was in reality the acknowledged chief of the scoundrels who had abducted his son.

"We will go at once," he exclaimed, fiercely.

"No; that won't do! You are tired, Miss Morgan, as any one can see. A good supper and a couple of hours' rest you must have. You need it. It won't do to leave you here alone, and I must take all my men with me. I will have your horse attended to, and you can ride one of mine on the return trip. Not a word, miss, if you please. You must rest; and the loss of a few hours will not hurt our chances of success."

He gave orders accordingly, and it was almost ten o'clock before the little cavalcade rode away from the Williamson Ranch.

Day was breaking when they reached the cabin of the Morgans.

They were wholly unprepared for the sight that greeted them.

The cabin was securely locked and bolted from the outside. Through the stout door a square hole had been sawed.

And the detective was gone!

CHAPTER VIII.

ENTRAPPED.

AFTER watching Betty Morgan until horse and rider disappeared in the dim and hazy distance, Rosenthal crept back to the little cot and composed himself for a quiet and restful afternoon.

He was weak and feverish and his head throbbed painfully.

He fell asleep, in a short time. When he awoke it was with a start and a sense of impending peril.

Some one was fumbling at the heavy door, which Rosenthal had locked on retiring. He got up and opened it; and a man, slightly intoxicated, stumbled in.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, straightening up with a jerk. "Betty's got comp'ny, hey?"

Rosenthal introduced himself.

"Your t'aughter, Miss Petty I pelef is her name, rote avay dis efening."

"Where'd she go?" asked Morgan—for he it was—scowling about the room.

Rosenthal professed an inability to answer the

question. He did not like Morgan's appearance and determined to be on his guard.

"I was shooed by somepoty vrom dot raween ould ofer dere. Miss Petty fint dot I was pad hurdet und zo she pring me py dis house. Dot vos dis morning; und dis efening she skeebt ould."

"You insulted her!" said Morgan, furiously.

"So hellup me cracious no! Dot young vo-mans vos a leedle ainshels. She vix dis he's vere I vos been shooed like a de't mans; und she mage me sooch a nice tinner like I vos a hodel. I voul't vighd vor dot gyurl like any tyfel."

"You're the feller that's runnin' the Jew shop up at Eli! I seen you there several times!"

A crafty look had come into Morgan's eyes.

"Yes; dot vos me! I vos gone indo de clod-ing und chewelry pizness recklar. Dot vos a goot down, I dinks me. Mine grandfodder valkt arround py dot name off Eli; und so I like dot blace egstra vell. Dere vos been money in dot down vor clodings und chewelry."

"Where was you going when this chap down-ed you?"

"I vos on my vay to de down soud off here. Maype dot vos a goot blace vor a pranch esdab-lishmend, I toughd."

The crafty look in Morgan's eyes deepened.

"Well, I reckon it's all right and that you're tellin' a straight yarn. Anyway, I'll take the chances on it. I disturbed you when I come in awhile ago. You was asleep; and from your looks I should say you needed it. I'll set around and smoke awhile, and git a bite to eat. You can go to bed and I'll not bother you any fur-ther. Sleep as long as you want to."

"I think I'll have to go back to town this evenin'. So, if I'm gone when you wake up, you'll know what's become o' me. I've got a little business to 'tend to there, that I didn't finish; and I tole the feller mebbe I'd come back and talk it over to-night. And as Betty's away and you're better off without comp'ny, I guess I'll go."

He turned his back on the pretended Jew, filled his pipe and seated himself in the door-way.

Rosenthal, seeing that Morgan desired to say nothing further, retreated to the room that Betty had assigned to him.

He knew that Morgan was revolving some evil plot in his mind, and he determined to feign slumber and watch him.

Accordingly he again sought the cot. Re-clining thus, he watched Morgan narrowly through a small aperture in the board partition. He believed some kind of treachery was intended; and placed a cocked revolver under the light bed-covering, convenient to his grasp.

For a full half-hour Morgan sat in the door-way, smoking. Then, as heavy breathing from the other room indicated that the Jew had fallen asleep, he knocked the ashes from his pipe and got up quietly.

He took off his shoes, placed them on the grass at the side of the door, and tip-toed softly into the room. Opening the partition door slowly and cautiously, he peered in at the sup-posed sleeper.

"Sound as a top!" he muttered, withdrawing his head after completing the survey.

Then he crept to the outer door and stepped lightly to the ground.

This door he locked and bolted securely. The windows he served in the same way.

"He can't get out o' there!" he observed, sur-veying the work critically. "That house is as stout as a jail. He might cut through the door if he had the right kind o' tools; but he ain't got 'em, for there ain't no tools in the house unless it's a case-knife, and he can't do much with that."

"Likely though, he'll sleep all night, now that he's got started. If he does, we'll be apt to wake him up with a purty surprise. Now, I must scoot!"

He drew on his shoes, brought a horse from the little stable and rode rapidly away in the direction of Eli.

There was an amused light in Rosenthal's eyes, as he watched Morgan's movements through half-closed lids. He actually smiled, as he heard Morgan bolting the door and windows. When the latter rode away, he crept to the wall and watched him as he galloped off over the prairie.

"He thinks he's got me like a fox in a trap!" he mused. "I can see through his little game. He believes he has fastened me up here securely, and he's gone to lay the case before Emerald Green. No doubt the Tigers will be rallied, and an attempt will be made to murder me to-night."

"I didn't like Morgan's looks from the first. He's a low-down, drunken dog, and in Green's pay, I'd wager a fortune. A pity, too, seeing what a fine girl he's got."

"I was getting along quite comfortably here, and I didn't want to leave until Miss Morgan's return. She may not be able to find Williamson, and I may have to take other steps to com-municate with him. If she finds him, he may come right on with his cowboys. In any event I ought to remain here to learn the result."

"There is one thing certain, however; I must get out of this house. I could hold it against a hundred men, for the walls are bullet-proof. But I couldn't hold it against fire, and they wouldn't hesitate to use that if necessary."

"Then it will not do for me to meet the Tigers, in my present weakened condition, on the open prairie. That would be inviting mur-der. It would be suicidal. And if I stay in the vicinity, they are almost certain to discover me in the morning. I might successfully con-ceal myself in the ravine—that is, if they didn't chance to examine it. And Betty might return with Williamson and the cowboys."

"Time enough to settle all this, perhaps, when I get out of here. Morgan may run across Emerald Green or some of the Tigers within a mile or two. If I was stronger I would wel-come and invite such an attack. As it is, I must skulk like a coyote!"

He stooped down and slowly unscrewed one of the heels from his shoes.

The heel was hollow, and contained some tiny cutting instruments and a little saw, coiled up like a watch-spring.

It straightened out with a leap as he released it.

"The door that that won't walk through has to be made out of something harder than wood. When it comes to steel and iron, I call on the other heel to yield up its treasures."

While Rosenthal is thus preparing to cut his way out of the cabin, let us briefly follow Morgan.

He reached Eli by sundown, and went straight to the Squatter's Rest.

A few words whispered hurriedly to Gabriel Crane was enough to send a messenger in hot haste for Emerald Green and Grizzly Martin.

They evidently considered the matter one of considerable moment, for they responded imme-diately to the call.

"The Jew is locked up in my cabin!" said Morgan, abruptly, as Crane piloted them into the little room at the rear of the saloon.

"Why, how's that?" Emerald asked, staring blankly at his informant. "I didn't know he had left Eli."

Morgan, in reply, detailed what he knew, adding:

"If you want to put him out o' the way for keeps, you'll never have a better chance. I suppose Betty has gone to spend the night at some neighbor's. I don't know where else she could go. So, of course, she'll be out of the way until morning, and I can easy enough fix up a story that'll satisfy her about the stranger's absence, when she gits back."

Grizzly still held to the opinion he had first entertained, that the Jew was not a detective in disguise. But the Jew's stubbornness in opening a shop, after the warning given, was beginning to weaken this belief. He said little, but he had ceased to combat Emerald's ideas on the subject.

As for Crane, he balanced himself on one leg of a chair, stretched out his long limbs and announced it as his solemn opinion that the Jew ought to be "put out of the way."

"That's what I think!" assented Green, "and if our tender-hearted friend, Grizzly, don't ob-ject, I'll announce that the motion has carried unanimately."

"You're positive, Morgan, that the fellow can't batter down the door or break through the windows in some way?"

"I'd stake my life on that!" declared Morgan, decidedly. "That house would make a better jail by long odds than the one you've got in this town. It would take a six-pounder to beat that door in!"

"Well, then, I don't know that there is any special necessity for haste!" Emerald announced. "He may not wake up for a long time yet, and if he does, all he can accomplish will be to beat his fists off in trying to get out."

"We don't want to get there much before midnight. I'd like to take a lot of the boys along, too. We might need them. Crane can send a man to hunt them up directly. It's only a ride of a couple of hours, and if we leave town too early we may be followed by eyes that we don't care to have watching us."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TEXAS TOM-CAT.

WITH the tools in his possession, it was not a very difficult job for Rosenthal to cut through the stout door. He sawed out a square hole large enough to permit the passage of his body. Then he placed the instruments in the shoe-heel, screwed it into place and prepared to leave the house.

He had drawn his body about half-way through the aperture when he heard the noise of hoofs and a man rode from behind the stable and clattered toward the door. The soft grass had deadened the hoof-strokes of his horse, and the interposition of the stable had prevented Rosenthal from noticing his approach.

The pretended Jew tried to slip through the door before the horseman could get near; but the revolver in his pocket became wedged in some way and kept him from accomplishing it.

In his haste and excitement, he could only strain and kick like a suspended turtle.

"Ho, ho, ho!" yelled the new-comer. "Spli sp't! sp't! Mariar! Mariar! Mee-e-ow! Hello, Moses! At yer old tricks, I see. You jest nat-erally beat the world. Never seen a man that liked to poke his nose into other folks's bizness like you do. What air you doin' in thar, any-way?"

He leaped from his pony and ran to Rosenthal's assistance.

"I don't reckon that you've gone to burglar-in'," as he came up, laughing. "Though this detective business ain't much better, 'cordin' to my notion."

He stopped and clapped his hands to his sides, as he noticed the look of disgust and annoyance upon Rosenthal's face.

"Well, may I be tee-totally eat up by dogs! Meeow! Meeow! Sp't, sp't! Mariar!"

"Oh, dry up that foolishness, and give me a lift!" Rosenthal now exclaimed, half-angrily. "What with your 'spitting' and 'meowing,' you make me tired. I'm stuck in this hole, and it's almost as hard to go backward as forward."

The stranger gave him the desired "lift," and Rosenthal was soon standing upright on the ground.

"If you hadn't scared me by riding up so unexpectedly, I wouldn't have been caught. Now, where did you come from? I thought you were in Texas."

The stranger's appearance was quite as singular as his manner. He was dressed in cowboy fashion; but, instead of the big white sombrero, his head was surmounted by a cat-skin cap. The partially-mounted head of the animal formed the visor, and the tail was curled round the cap in the form of a plume.

"Didn't come up out o' the ground, that's cert'in! Jest scoutin' around a little, not havin' anything purtickler to do, and thought I'd step over an' take a look at this boomin' town o' Eli. Thar's slashin' o' fun over thar, I've an idee. S'pose 'tain't no use to ask you whar you come frum, fer I seen you come out o' that house. Killed anybody in thar and want some 'un to help bury 'em?"

"No, Tom-cat, I haven't killed any one," Rosenthal answered, quite soberly. "I sawed my way out of there, though, for fear some one might kill me. They're going to try it; and I didn't care to be cooped up in that house when the attempt was made."

"Shol!" exclaimed the eccentric cowboy, who delighted in calling himself the Texas Tom-cat. "How's that? Mebbe I kin b'ar a hand with you in the purceedin's."

"Yes, you can; and I'd be glad to have your aid. I am after a scoundrel who calls himself Emerald Green. He's at the head of a band of cut-throats and horse-thieves known as the Emerald Tigers.

"He knows I have spotted him, and he is determined to put me out of the way. I happened into this house quite accidentally. I was shot by a man who had concealed himself in the ravine over there," removing his hat and revealing the bloody bandages. "I think the villain was one of Emerald's men. And I discovered a little while ago that I had sought aid in the house of a man who, I am convinced, is also one of the Tigers."

"He locked me in, when he thought I was asleep, and rode toward Eli as fast as his horse could carry him."

"Tigers is purty thick up this way, then?" re-marked the cowboy, with a grim smile, after listening closely to the story. "Tigers and tom-cats 'ud be mighty apt to make the fur fly ef they sh'u'd come together."

"This hyer tom-cat ain't a hankerin' purtickler fer a fight, but I guess he'll have to wade in."

You stood by me down in Texas onc't, an' I've been a-longin' ever sence fer a chance to return the favor. This hyer's the chance!"

"I know you're true as steel, but I can hardly ask you to risk your life with me, unless you desire to!" Rosenthal returned, as he swept the horizon with an eagle-like glance. "And besides, I don't exactly know what course to pursue."

"Why, tackle 'em!" cried the Tom-cat. "Tackle 'em tooth an' nail! When you've got a fight on yer han's, fight fer all you're worth. Them's the sentiments I try to live up to. An' you kin jest bet that when you hear the Tom-cat howl in dead airnest, somebody's a-goin' to git hurt mighty soon afterwards."

"Yes; but there's a young lady in the case!" and Rosenthal explained the situation more fully. "I don't want to remain here and I don't want to go away. It won't do to leave a note of explanation, for her father or Emerald might find it."

"Put yer boldest foot front!" declared the Tom-cat. "Put 'er front! You're after this ring-leader o' the Green Tigers. Go an' git him! Them's my sentiments. Go right into this hyer blasted town, snap the irons on him, an' dar' any man to left a finger. Don't wait fer him to come after you. You go after him. Ef we can't take 'im, thar'll be, tany rate, some o' the tallest screechin' and fightin' ever heerd on these perarys."

"Ef you down him—an' we kin do it—then come back fer the cowboys o' ole Williamson and tackle the rest o' his fellers in their own jungle. That'll be doin', at a stroke, what seems to me like a mighty big job the way you've been figgerin' it out. Bluff an' a bold game is allus the game that wins."

There appeared to be much sound philosophy in the cowboy's opinions; and that the Tom-cat was no fool, however eccentric he might be, Rosenthal knew from previous experience.

"I tell you the thing kin be worked!" the cowboy urged, seeing that his words were having effect. "This chief o' the Tigers don't own the hull town and all the folks that's in it. Thar's white men thar; an' they'll stand by ye, when you need it. Ef they fasten on one o' us, t'other kin slip out hyer, git Williamson's cowboys an' take the camp. I ain't afraid but what one o' us'll git away!"

"I believe you are about right!" Rosenthal replied. "A bold game is generally a winning game—especially when you have a hand to back it."

"An' sometimes when you ain't!" the Tom-cat corrected. "Bluff, my bold detective! Bluff's the word! Then rake in the pot with a six-shooter!"

"I'll go!" decided Rosenthal, after a few minutes of deep pondering. "The cowboys, even if they are found at the ranch, which is doubtful, will probably not get here before morning. Emerald will move against me before that time. We'll checkmate him by a counter-move."

"Tom-cats against Tigers!" shouted the cowboy, delighted at the success of his argument. "Mariar! Mariar! Me-ow-ow!"

Then he checked his enthusiastic outburst and asked seriously:

"How fur is it to this bloomin' town?"

"About two hours' ride."

"Whoop! We kin make it afore dark!"

"By brisk riding, yes! But you must remember that I'm not quite as strong as I should be."

The sudden resolve and the excitement had greatly added to Rosenthal's strength; but even then he was not, as he stated, as strong as he ought to be for the successful accomplishment of so important an undertaking.

"As soon as I can get my horse out of the stable I'll be ready for the trip."

"Hyer, I'll do that!" cried the Tom-cat. "Ef you ain't as stout as you'd ort to be, saye yer stren'th for more importanter bizness."

He dashed by Rosenthal, and soon returned leading the horse.

"Lucky that Morgan didn't think to take my horse, when he locked me in!" observed the detective, as he proceeded to mount. "I suppose he would, if he hadn't been so sure that I couldn't get out."

"Twouldn't a' done him no good nohow!" said the cowboy enthusiastically. "Mine'll carry double. Now, p'int yer nose toward town and we'll travel!"

"Remember, whatever happens, that I'm Moses Rosenthal, the Jew; unless I indicate otherwise!" continued the detective, as they started at a swinging gallop.

"You bet! I learn't that lesson onc't! The

Tom-cat's a scholar that don't forgit his lessons. Got a memory like a steel-trap. I'd 'a' took a deplym at college ef I'd 'a' tried fer it."

They pushed their horses briskly and the short twilight was ending when they reached the town.

"It's hardly dark enough to enable us to ride up the main street without being identified!" Rosenthal observed, cautiously. "Best try the back way, I suppose."

"Up the main street'd be my motto!" decided the Tom-cat. "Bluff, my bold detective! Bluff's the game! Thar ain't anybody in this hyer village that knows me; an' ef a business man of about your size, what's got a shop on the main street, can't mosey along the public trail without bein' afraid o' shadders, why, he'd better brace up. Them's my sentiments!"

Rosenthal, however, thought it advisable to enter the town without attracting observation; and the cowboy at last gave a reluctant consent.

They proceeded quietly to the little stable in the rear of Rosenthal's shop. There they left their horses, saddled and bridled, ready for any emergency.

"They haven't left the town yet, or we would have noticed them on the trip in. Now, if there's any deviltry afoot, or any schemes being concocted, we can find out all about it by a little maneuvering."

Rosenthal, having made this statement, led the way to the Squatter's Rest.

A little-used hall opened from it upon a side street. This was the hall that led to the conference-room of the Tiger chiefs. The detective applied a key to the door, locking it again when they had gained entrance.

They passed through several doors in this way. These, however, the detective did not lock.

"We may want to retreat rather suddenly," he explained, "and it takes too much time to unlock so many doors when one is in a hurry."

Having arrived at the inner room, Rosenthal knelt upon the hall floor and applied one eye to the keyhole. As the reader has guessed, the room contained Emerald Green, Grizzly Martin, Gabriel Crane and Bob Morgan; and they were discussing the proposed movement against the Jew.

They're a-talkin' about carvin' up a man of about your size, I calc'late!" whispered the cowboy, as he pressed an ear against the door. "They're your men! Unlock the door; an' ef they don't throw up their hands, we'll down 'em!"

A sudden trampling filled the hall, and a number of men advanced suddenly toward the door of the inner room, from the street. They were the Tigers which Gabriel Crane had summoned by a messenger.

CHAPTER X.

THE TOM-CAT SHOWS HIS CLAWS.

"Scoot's the word!" whispered the Tom-cat, as he heard the trampling and saw the advancing men dimly outlined in the gloom. "That's a Tiger re-enforcement, I calc'late, an' it won't do to git cotched between 'em. Bluff's a good word; but thar ain't no sense in buckin' ag'in' a regiment. No use in showin' our claws jest to git 'em clipped!"

He drew Rosenthal into a dark corner of the room as he made this hurried statement. The movement was accomplished none too soon. Rosenthal had left the inner door unlocked and opened, to facilitate a hasty retreat should such become necessary; and this aided the Tigers in making a rapid approach.

The conference room was the only one lighted and the men passed the crouching figures, wholly unconscious of their presence.

"Better git out o' hyer?" asked the Tom-Cat, in a low voice. "A couple o' tom-cats like us ain't no buz'ness bouncin' a cage-full o' tigers. Them's my sentiments. But ef you say go in, I'm with you, tooth and nail. Been so long sence I guy a giniwine fightin' screech that it's powerful temptin'. Which shell we do? How er run?"

"In this case discretion is certainly the better part of valor," the detective replied. "Cork up your howls until a better occasion presents. Then I shall be glad to hear your melodious screeching. I'd like to hear what they're saying in there, but the risks are too great."

He arose from his cramped position and inclined his head in a listening attitude.

"The inside doors weren't locked, you say?" thundered Emerald Green, unguardedly raising his voice in his excitement. "Then there has been some one spying on us!"

"Scoot's the word!" whispered the Tom-cat.

"They're a-comin' hot-footed!"

He leaped away, lightly and nimbly, closely followed by the detective.

"To the shop!" cried Rosenthal in a low voice, turning the lock behind him, as they stood in the street. "We can easily reach it while they're searching the rooms. They can have no idea that I'm in the town, and will never think of visiting my shop."

As the shop adjoined the Squatter's Rest, it was no difficult matter to gain admittance to it. They had only to creep around the building and enter by the rear door.

"Here they come!" said Rosenthal, placing himself at a window that commanded a view of the street. "They couldn't find any one in the house, and so they're looking further."

"Oh, hookey, they're a-going toward the stable!" exclaimed the Tom-cat, almost beside himself with excitement. "Stick out yer claws an' git ready to screech, ole man! They'll diskiver the horses dead sure!"

A few moments later the Tom-cat was confirmed in his assertion. After poking around in every hole that seemed to offer a place of concealment, Emerald was about to abandon the search, when one of his men sung out from the stable:

"Hyer's the Jew's hoss; an' another critter. They've got saddles an' bridles onto 'em an' look like they've been rid lately."

"We ought to have mounted the horses and got away on them!" said Rosenthal, realizing the danger likely to be entailed by the discovery. "I forgot them in the hurry and excitement of the moment."

"Too late now, boss!" observed the Tom-cat, philosophically. "Hindsight's a heap better'n foresight. We didn't do it, an' so we'll have to let her went. It'll be tigers agin' tom-cats 'fore mornin' or else I'm teetotally off my base."

Emerald Green advanced to the stable and surveyed the horses carefully.

"That's the Jew's horse, certain!" he exclaimed. "I don't know the other nag. Now, how did they get here?"

"Here, Morgan!" calling that individual to his side. "Take a look in the stable. It's rather dark in there, but you can see well enough. That's the Jew's horse isn't it?"

"The very identical critter!" asserted Morgan, opening his eyes widely in surprise and wonder. "How he got in there, though, beats me. He was in the stable at my place when I left there!"

"That infernal Jew rode him in, of course."

"But he couldn't!" Morgan protested. "He couldn't get out o' that house, I tell you. He's there now! It'd take a pile-driver to break that door down!"

"No doubt you think so, Morgan!" with an angry and dissatisfied shrug. "All the same I tell you the Jew came into town this evening on that horse. The presence of the other nag shows that he may have had and doubtless did have, help. Some one aided him to get out of that house and then came on to town with him. And they have been spying on us in the back room!"

He glared around, as he made the assertion.

"They're not far away. In fact I'd be willing to wager something handsome that they're in the Jew's shop this minute."

"Hit the bull's-eye plum center, that time!" whispered the Tom-cat. "Thar'll be fur a-flyin' afore midnight, is my guess."

"Try the back door, Crane!" suggested Emerald. "You've got a key that'll fit it."

"Don't hanker after the job, so long's I don't know who's behind it!" and Crane drew in his long neck in a way that showed he had no notion of making the attempt.

"Hello, there in the shop!" shouted Emerald, lifting his voice so that it could be distinctly heard.

"Hello yerself!" answered the Tom-cat. "What's the matter with you fellers, wakin' a man up out o' a nice gentle snooze?"

"Who are you, and who's in there with you?" asked Emerald, rather surprised at receiving so prompt a reply.

"Me! Waal, I'm gineraly called the Texas Tom-cat. 'Most any name'll do, though. None of 'em wu'th much at the tail-eend o' a bank-check."

"And who's in there with you?"

"Not so fast, pardner, ef you please. I ain't been interduced to your handle yit, I ain't."

"Well, my name's Green, Emerald Green. These gentlemen with me are the mayor and a posse of special officers. We have a warrant

for the arrest of Moses Rosenthal, in whose shop you are now."

"A dod-rotted lie!" growled the Tom-cat, under his breath. Then aloud:

"You must be some kin to the Green Tigers that's got a jungle down tost the North Fork, jedgin' by yer name."

"What does the fellow mean by Green Tigers?" asked Emerald, turning to Martin, with well-feigned ignorance.

"Blast if I know!" replied Martin. "The feller's a crank, I reckon."

"Who is in there with you?" demanded Emerald, returning to the charge.

"An' ole friend o' the undersigned," the Tom-cat answered, quite truthfully. "He's the owner o' this hyar shebang, an' I'm a-payin' him a perlite visit. Found him cooped up in a log cabin out on the perary. Somebody'd shot him, an' he was nighabout out o' his head. He's in hyer now, ef that's what you want to know; and he's a-goin' to stay in hyer. Now you hear me. When he gits better, ef you've got anything to say to him, come and say it in daylight. Tell then, you'd better mosey."

"We have a warrant for his arrest, and we must serve it!" shouted Emerald.

"Serve it by readin'," the Tom-cat replied.

"You can't get in hyer to-night."

The leader of the Tigers came quite close to the window, from which the cowboy had been talking.

"If you don't let us in we'll burn the shanty over your head!"

The words were simply diabolical in their cold cruelty.

"Burn and be durned to ye! You can't do it without burnin' up the hull block, an' the people o' the town will have somethin' to say about that, I calc'late."

Emerald uttered an oath, and threw up his right hand. As the arm straightened it was seen that the hand held a revolver.

At the same instant a flash and a report came from the window. The Tom-cat had anticipated some such movement, and was prepared for it. He had held a cocked revolver in his hand all through the interview, and when the sport attempted that dastardly shot, it was met with a promptness that was quite demoralizing.

He had aimed at the wrist of the sport, but the aim was necessarily hurried. The bullet struck the cylinder of Emerald's weapon; the revolver was knocked from his outstretched hand, and the bullet buried itself in the shoulder of one of the Tigers.

Emerald uttered a cry of startled surprise, and the wounded man fell over with a dreadful howl.

"Better git out o' this!" warned Martin, retreating precipitately; an example that was followed by Emerald and the demoralized Tigers. "The feller knows how to use a gun. Tain't healthy to crowd a chap like that!"

"Go it, ye cowards!" screamed the Tom-cat, sending another shot after the retreating men. "'Tain't the fu'st time that I've bucked ag'in' tigers. Tigers ag'in' tom-cats. Whoop! Mariar! Mariar! Sp't, sp't, sp't, mee-ee-ow-ow!"

The retreating Tigers disappeared almost as if by magic, as a number of men came streaming out of the adjacent saloons, attracted by the shots.

Not a soul was to be seen; and, after speculating vainly in regard to the source and cause of the shots, they went back to their liquor and games.

"The Tigers will not return for some time!" observed Rosenthal, peering into the street. "In fact, they may not come back to-night, for some of these are all-night houses, and a crowd would gather immediately at the sounds of firing, just as it did now."

"I'm almost dead for want of rest and sleep, and my head feels like it would split open. That ride, and the excitement since, has been almost too much for me. So, if you'll watch awhile, Tom-cat, I'll try to catch a nap. Wake me up at once, if you notice anything suspicious."

"Couldn't we git the hosses now, an' scoot?" asked the cowboy, anxiously.

"No; this house is watched, and will be watched from this time on. It would simply be inviting assassination to make such an attempt."

Rosenthal had curled himself on the little bed before he ceased speaking. His strength was exhausted. He realized that he must have rest and sleep, or he would not be able to face the grave complications which seemed to lie just ahead. He knew that the cowboy was faithful and perfectly trustworthy; and in this frame of mind he gave himself up to slumber.

CHAPTER XI. BETTY'S DISCOVERY.

GREAT was the astonishment of Betty Morgan when she saw that gaping hole in the door, and discovered that the detective was gone. A glance also showed that Rosenthal's horse was not in the stable.

"What can it mean?" she asked, staring amazedly at Williamson.

"Queerest thing I ever heard of!" declared the old man. "It looks like foul play; and still it don't look like foul play."

"You say the man was too weak to travel! If any one wanted to get at him, I can't see why they'd take the trouble to cut that kind of a hole in the door. Besides, the windows are barred from the outside. He'd be a blessed idiot, sure enough, if he tried to keep out enemies by barring the windows from the outside."

"It's too deep a mystery for me, Mr. Williamson!" she exclaimed, almost despairingly.

A sudden fear had cut to her heart like a knife. Was it possible that her father had had anything to do with this mystery?

"I expected to find father and the detective both here. I don't see that we can do anything until we get further light. I don't know where this lair of the Tigers is. If I did I would willingly pilot your men to it."

"I am afraid the trail breaks at this point!" said Williamson, in a voice that held something like a sob. "Oh, my poor boy!"

"He will be found!" replied Betty, encouragingly. "Never allow yourself to doubt that. It is quite probable, I think, that the detective has gone back to Eli, for some cause. What it is, I can't even guess. It may be that father accompanied him. Father may have given him some news that necessitated a change in his plans."

"What's the meaning of those bars, then, and that hole in the door?"

"Of course I can't answer that, Mr. Williamson. I maybe altogether wrong. He may not be in Eli. He may be dead!"

Her voice was awe-stricken and tremulous.

"It seems to me, however, that we ought to make some inquiries in Eli first. If they fail to reveal anything, we can try some other plan. I am acquainted in Eli. I know where the Jew's shop is located; and if he has been in the town I can find it out."

"I believe that I am the one to undertake the investigation. Emerald Green and his Tigers would think it nothing strange should they chance to see me there; while they would become alarmed at once at your appearance or the appearance of any of your men."

"If I should come across the fellow I would choke his black heart out, if he refused to tell me where my boy is hid!" Williamson exclaimed fiercely.

"And the last thing in the world you should do, Mr. Williamson. I would only acquaint his band with the fact that you had discovered that the boy is in their hands. Believing that they would be treated with as scant ceremony they would—"

"Murder him!" cried the unhappy father. "You are right, Miss Morgan. I am half-crazy with grief, and not able to make any suggestions that seem as good as yours. I place myself in your hands; and will do as you say."

It was a pitiable sight. This strong, brave man so broken and shaken by grief as to be almost wholly incapable of directing the search for his son. He realized his condition, and relied implicitly on the good judgment and sound sense of Betty Morgan.

"My advice, Mr. Williamson, is that you conceal yourself with your men in this vicinity, until I can make an investigation and report. I will return just as soon as possible. But do not leave until I do return, or at least until time enough has elapsed to make it certain that I cannot come."

"There are a number of deep ravines across yonder, about a mile away. Your cowboys are no doubt familiar with them. Hide there. Keep a good lookout. I will come back as soon as I learn something definite."

She gave some further words of instruction; then turned her horse's head toward Eli and galloped away.

It was about seven o'clock in the morning, when she entered the town. Not many people were yet stirring. A few of the stores were open; and some thirsty souls had gathered at their favorite saloons for a morning "eye-opener."

She attracted very little notice, as she galloped lightly up the street. The Tom-cat saw her, however, as he saw everything. But he did not know her; and Rosenthal was asleep.

She tied her horse to a hitching-post, gathered her riding-skirt in one hand, and ran lightly toward the Squatter's Rest.

The sound of voices in front, caused her to seek the rear entrance. She believed that if her father was in town he would be found at this saloon, for it was one of his favorite resorts. If found there she intended to question him boldly in regard to what he knew about Rosenthal; for she could not get rid of the ugly idea that he was in some way connected with the Jew's mysterious disappearance.

Pushing the rear door open, she advanced through the hall that led to the bar and the gaming-rooms.

Here the voices which she had heard in the street changed from a hum into distinct sentences.

She stopped, horrified and aghast.

The conversation concerned her, and was not at all complimentary in tone. Worse, her father was leading it!

"Betty Morgan's a deceitful bussy, if I do say so, that oughtn't to!" Morgan exclaimed, bringing his hand down on the bar in a way that made the glasses jingle. "I believe she's gone into the pay of this detective. I didn't think of it until just a little while ago; but now I'm sure of it. And more, he sent her with some kind o' word to Williamson!"

"This is important, if true!" said Emerald, in his smooth, even voice.

"It's true! I know it! She's been rather up with me for a long time. Kind o' held me off at arm's-length, you know. Hain't acted at all like a daughter. I thought it was because I'd been bowlin' up purty free. Women generally don't like the smell o' liquor, and Betty's a woman in that respect, all over."

"But, I tell you, it's somethin' worse than liquor. She's suspicioned, from some cause or 'nuther, that I belong to the Tigers. So when this blasted detective come along with his glib tongue, she fell right in with his plans, and turned ag'in' her father."

"'Tis a little tough!" laughed Emerald. "But I guess you're about right. And now that the young lady has tumbled from her pedestal, what objection have you to my carrying out the little scheme I mentioned some time ago?"

"None at all! Take her, if you want her, and joy to your bargain! Give me a hundred dollars and I'll never lift a finger. Oh, but she'll make you a dandy wife, Emerald! She's got a temper, though, and you'll have to trim her claws or she'll scratch your eyes out. Just fork over the hundred and sling the word when you want her, and you can count on my helping you!"

Betty cowered against the wall, sick at heart and faint, as these brutal words fell on her unwilling ears.

And this was her father! The man she had tried to regard with filial respect and affection. It was too horrible for thought! Surely she must be dreaming. Was it not all a hideous nightmare from which she would soon awaken?

No! the words that continued to come from that whisky-scented room, would admit of no such generous doubts. Her father was a soulless, black-hearted monster. He was one of the notorious Emerald Tigers, and was now infamously bargaining with his chief for the sale of his own flesh and blood.

So great was her mental torture, that she almost shrieked aloud, as she crouched, panting, against the wall.

She could hear no more, but crept falteringly to the door by which she had entered. She looked white and pinched and old—so old!—as she stood for a moment, hesitatingly, on the wooden sidewalk.

Then, with a cry, that was half a scream, she fled wildly down the street.

CHAPTER XII.

A DUEL INTERRUPTED.

THE Tom-cat kept watch at the window, and Rosenthal slept peacefully until morning. The Tigers did not return to the assault—for the best of reasons. They feared to. The street was pretty well lined with saloons, most of them all-night houses, with a heavy patronage. An assault in force would call these men from the bars and gaming-tables, and an awkward explanation would be the result.

After retreating from the rear of Rosenthal's shop, the Tigers retired to the little back-room, which they generally used for purposes of consultation, and proceeded to a thorough canvass of the situation.

There was not much comfort to be found in it, though they examined it from every possible point of view. They feared the better-disposed

people of the town. More than once a Vigilance Committee had attempted to straighten out matters that seemed crooked; and it might think it its duty to straighten out this, if too much noise was made. And a Vigilance Committee was such a heedless, unreasoning thing; and, withal, so exceedingly dangerous.

"They can't stay in that shop always!" said Emerald. "They must come out, sooner or later; and when they do, that will be our opportunity. We must pick a quarrel with them in some way. Make them seem the aggressors, if possible. Then get the 'drop,' and down them without much ceremony. It's the only way the thing can be worked without the risk of having a mob at our heels."

They adjourned to the bar-room shortly after daybreak. The last customer had departed and the saloon was deserted.

Here they lounged and talked for another hour or two before venturing out upon the street.

A guard had been kept over the shop all this while.

"What horse is that?" asked Emerald, as he saw Miss Morgan's horse standing at the hitching-post.

"It's Betty Morgan's!" answered the guard. "She is in the house, ain't she? Anyway, she went in there a good while ago."

The guard had been at the other end of his beat, when she came out, and so had not noticed her as she hurried down the other street.

Morgan stumbled back into the saloon, swearing luridly, and began a hasty search for his daughter. Emerald and the remaining Tigers joined him, and the search was made in an exhaustive and systematic manner.

"She ain't hyer!" said Grizzly, puffing from his exertions.

"Any fool can see that!" Morgan snapped. "But she was here, and I'll bet a ten-dollar note she heard every word I said about her."

"Perhaps she will come back, or send for her horse," suggested Emerald, as the baffled and disgusted searchers again filed into the street. "If she sends for him, we'll follow the messenger. She can't get out of the town very easily without a horse; and we must keep our eyes open."

When the Tigers first ventured into the street, the Tom-cat awoke Rosenthal.

"What do you think of 'em?" he queried, as they again came out of the bar-room. "Look like they'd lost something an' was hunting fer it, don't they?"

The sight of the horse standing there had no especial significance for Rosenthal. It was not the one he had seen Miss Morgan ride away on. The cowboy had stated the rider was a woman; that she had entered the saloon by the rear entrance, remained a little while, and then hastened down the street. But all this suggested nothing.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'd do," continued the Tom-cat, speaking of the men grouped in front of the saloon. "People air crawlin' out all around, gittin' ready for the day's bizness. Thar's a lot of 'em on the street now, an' they're a-thickenin'."

"My belief is they'll see fa'r play, er take a hand in the fun. I ain't afraid o' the chaps in front o' that prairie-dog hole. Not by a jugful, I ain't! We can't stay in hyer allus. I'm gittin' wolfish now. Feel like I could eat a steer-horns, hoofs and all. Thar'll be another case o' cannibalism ready fer the papers to write about, ef I don't git something to eat purty soon!"

"Now, my idee is to march right out o' hyer, open an' above-board. Ef any man goes fer to pull a gun, down 'im. Bluff, my bold detective! Bluff's allus the game that wins!"

Rosenthal was as bold and daring a man as could be found anywhere. But his training had made him extremely careful and cautious, and his present physical weakness had a tendency to make him more so.

He knew, however, that he would never be able to leave the shop without having the eyes of the Tigers fixed upon his movements.

"You are right, Tom-cat," he assented. "Get your shooters ready, and I will proceed to open the shop as if nothin' unusual had happened. We must get out of here, and a bold move is probably the best. I must get back to Morgan's soon, and find out what the young lady has accomplished. It seems we have wasted time in coming here, but we may accomplish somethin' yet."

He swung the front door open while speaking, and stepping boldly into the street, began removing the shutters from the windows.

"Oh, my gootness!" he spluttered, in a voice

intended to be heard by the Tigers, "dot mans musd haf shooded me py a cannons, vrom de vay dot mine he't wheels v'en I my arms leef ub. Id go sbin round like a hummin'-dop."

"Hello!" exclaimed Emerald. "They're wakin' up over there. Now, to down them!"

The Tom-cat stepped out of the shop at the same moment.

"What idiot is that?" demanded Emerald, in a loud voice, speaking to Morgan. "No one but a fool would wear such an outlandish cap!"

"Wouldn't, hey?" yelled the Tom-cat, who was bristling for a fight.

"I must git out o' this!" whispered Martin, hastily. "If you git into a muss it won't do fer me to be seen with you. I might be called on to act as judge in the case. So I'll purceed to make myself scarce."

He backed into the saloon and retreated through the rear door.

"I wasn't speaking to you!" Emerald replied, coldly. "But if you overheard my words, all right. I stick to them!"

"Don't know who I am, hey?" said the cowboy, advancing slowly, while an excited crowd began to gather. "Well, I'm the Texas Tom-cat, I am; an' I kin claw the hide off'n any feller that pokes fun at my cap."

Emerald saw that the cowboy would probably prove a wicked fighter and his desire for an encounter cooled somewhat. But he could not back down, no matter what the danger.

"I don't have to ask anybody who you air!" shouted the cowboy. "You're the chief o' a band o' hoss-thieves and murderers, and your name's Emerald Green!"

The Jew had followed the bold and eccentric cowboy; and now stood near, with hands thrust deeply into his pockets and his stupid eyes rolling wildly.

"Oh, mine gootness, vos dot so?" he ejaculated.

"You bet it's so! And these hyer's the chaps that tried to lay us out last night."

"You're a liar!" exclaimed Green, reaching for his revolver, an example imitated by several of his followers.

"Fair play!" shouted the crowd. "Take yer han's off'n them guns. This is a fight between Emerald and the Tom-cat; and may the best man win!"

As the sport reached for his revolver, both hands of the cowboy leaped into the air. Each contained a revolver; and Emerald saw that one was pointed full at him and that the other threatened his followers.

"Tom-cats ag'in' tigers!" shouted the cowboy. "Hyer I am, teeth and claws! Whoop! Mariar! Mariar! Sp't, sp't, sp't, meeow!"

"You've got the drop on me!" said Emerald, sullenly. "Put up your gun; I'm not going to give you a chance to down me by pulling mine."

"Want to shoot me in the back sometime, hey? Well, Mister Tiger, I won't be hard on you. I'd like to brand you, though, so that I'll know you whenever we meet ag'in'. I'll just draw my claws into their velvet skin and give you a second chance fer the pot. 'Nuther words, I'll put up my weapons and meet you in a fa'r, stand-up fight. Anyway you want it. Teeth an' claws, fists, knives er pistols. I ain't noways purtickler. You kin pay yer money an' take yer choice."

A yell of approval went up from the rapidly augmenting crowd; and Emerald saw that he must fight or make a complete back-down.

"Pistols it is!" he exclaimed, angrily.

He was a crack shot; and in a regular duel the cowboy would have no opportunity to get the "drop" on him.

He knew from the way the Tom-cat handled his weapons that he was a pistol-expert; but he had to take the chances. If he refused to meet him, after the cowboy's bold and even generous offer, he would lose the respect, not only of the Tigers, but of every fighting man in the town.

Street duels, in a town like Eli, are not elaborate affairs. The combatants take their positions. Wheel at a signal and commence firing.

On this occasion no seconds were chosen. The crowd was relied on to render any necessary assistance and see that justice was done to each.

Gabriel Crane was selected to give the signal for the firing to commence.

"Air you all ready?" he shouted, swinging a dirty red handkerchief up and down.

All eyes were turned upon the duelists and no one saw a sallow-faced and beady-eyed individual tip-toe his way toward the throng.

It was Saffron Sol, and he carried in his hand the deadly bomb with which he had once defied the Tigers.

"Air you all ready?" again called Gabriel Crane.

"Ready? Yes; we're ready for eternity!" Saffron Sol fairly screamed the words, and, as he did so, he gave the bomb an upward toss that could scarcely fail to land it at Rosenthal's feet.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FIENDISH COMPACT.

A GENERAL cry of horror and dismay arose as the deadly missile hurtled through the air. Those startling words had drawn all eyes to Saffron Sol. Many present were among those he had held at bay in front of the jail; and they recognized the fateful dynamite bomb instantly.

Crane dropped the handkerchief and took to his heels; and almost every man in the crowd turned in flight. It was the prompting of blind instinct, for none of them could by any possibility have reached a place of safety before the descending of the bomb.

As for Saffron Sol, he stood with arms folded, apparently heedless of the violent death that speedily awaited him in common with those around. There was a suicidal glare in his beady eyes, a hectic flush on his yellow cheeks, and his breath came in quick hard gasps.

"Three times have I killed Bob Brentwood!" he yelled, as the bomb curved downward toward the Jew.

Rosenthal recoiled as he saw the bomb mounting. He knew its deadly nature, even if the frantic rush had not informed him. To run was useless.

In this time of supreme peril the stupid look disappeared from his eyes; his form straightened to its natural, manly proportions; and a firm, though desperate, resolve shone in his face.

As that terrible missile of death descended, the disguised detective caught it in his open hands, with a touch so light and gentle that it could not have crushed an eggshell. It was a feat not excelled by that of any ball-player that ever graced the diamond.

But, when the terrible ordeal was passed, his face became corpse-like in its pallor and he trembled like a leaf.

A shout came from those who had witnessed the performance; and Saffron Sol, seeing that his murderous intentions had been foiled, turned to run. The stampeding crowd stopped, stared at the bomb which the Jew was holding in plain view, then darted in angry pursuit of the man who had thrown it.

The duel was forgotten. Emerald Green had followed in Crane's retreating footsteps; and the Tom-cat threw himself with desperate vigor into the chase.

But the hunted man seemed to have the power of magically disappearing. The pursuit came to naught. The shock and terror were not quickly forgotten, however, and all through the day excited knots of men gathered on the streets and discussed the probable motive of the bomb-thrower.

Shortly after noon one of the Tigers approached Emerald Green with the information that he had located Saffron Sol in an unused stable.

"Better rally the boys, hadn't I, and drag the feller out o' there?"

"No!" decided Emerald, positively. "Do nothing of the kind. I want to have a talk with him, for I think I can use him to advantage."

The chief of the Tigers had been doing some heavy thinking that morning. The more he thought the more puzzled he became. It was evident that the bomb had been hurled at the pretended Jew, with the intention of slaying him regardless of the lives of the bystanders. It seemed the act of a madman.

What was the motive? He had asked himself that question again and again. Saffron Sol had called the detective Bob Brentwood.

"And this is the third time he has killed him!" mused Emerald. "What did the fellow mean by that? I must see him and find out!"

Not wishing to attract attention to his movements, he set off in a leisurely way for the stable which his subordinate had pointed out. It was beyond the suburbs, in a rather isolated location.

He realized the perilous nature of his errand. Saffron Sol might regard him as one of the pursuers and attempt to slay him when he entered the building.

He gained the stable, constantly expecting a shot from the concealed man. No one was visible, and he began to think his informant had been mistaken. At length he noticed the toe of a boot protruding from beneath a roll of hay.

Drawing a revolver, he coolly covered the place where he supposed the man's body to be.

"I've got you covered, Saffron Sol!" he said, speaking in a smooth and even voice. "I knew

you were here and I came to have a talk with you. I have no wish to lead those bloodhounds to this place and will not do so if you will act reasonably.

"I must say I am very much obliged to you for getting me out of a very ugly quarrel this morning; though I thought for a time, when I saw that bomb sailing through the air, that the jig was up with all of us."

"You are an enemy of this detective, Bob Brentwood, and so am I. On that point, at least, we can agree. Perhaps we can form an alliance that will aid in putting him under the ground."

Sol did not stir until Brentwood's name was mentioned. Then he rolled out from under the hay, clutching a revolver in his right hand, and stared curiously at the speaker.

"I heard you say that you wanted to kill the fellow?" Emerald questioned, looking in the eyes of Saffron over the deadly tube of the revolver. "I'm in the same box; so we ought to be friends."

"I did kill him!" cried Saffron Sol, sitting up, while his eyes blazed. "I killed him twice, but he won't stay killed. Once I shot him through the heart; and this week I shot him through the head with a Winchester."

"His head is tied up!" replied Emerald, lowering his weapon when he saw that Sol had no intention of using his. "So you're the man that shot him? Well, your ball only grazed his head. Perhaps you didn't do any better work when you put a bullet through his heart, as you claim."

"Oh, but I saw him lying dead that time. I know a dead man when I see one."

Emerald could not repress a start. Saffron Sol's experience was so similar to his own. He also had shot Bob Brentwood through the heart as he believed. He also had seen him lying dead, after that shot, with white face and sightless eyes staring heavenward.

He did not care to mention it, however, to Sol.

"Well, it seems that he is still alive, anyway!" he exclaimed with a forced laugh. "Now, to come to the point that brought me here. I am in control of a band of desperate men. I want Bob Brentwood put out of the way; and if you will do the job I will pay you handsomely and stand by you with my men through thick and thin."

"Put her there!" exclaimed Saffron, with an insane chuckle, stretching forth his hand in an eager way that showed how much he valued the proffered aid. "I'm the man you want."

"That's just what I thought! I turned the thing over in my mind pretty carefully after you tossed that bomb into the crowd. And by the way, the manner in which Brentwood caught that was the nerviest thing I ever saw."

"Yes, curse him; he's got grit enough! And as many lives as a cat!"

"So when I learned where you had holed up I determined to come and have a talk with you. We have the same object in view—the death of Bob Brentwood—and therefore we are the last men in the world to be enemies. You've got the sand to put a job of that kind through; and I've got the man to back you after the work's done!"

"Where did Brentwood go?" Saffron Sol asked.

"Now, I can't tell you. When the crowd started after you, he ran in the opposite direction with the bomb in his hands. He may have returned and entered his shop without attracting my notice. Perhaps he's there now. There were so many people on the street that I couldn't make out anything plainly. And, besides, I will confess I was a little excited. If he's there, the Texas Tom-cat, as he calls himself, is with him; and that chap's a wicked fighter."

"In going into this thing now, Saffron, I don't like to ask any questions, because I don't want to answer any and likely enough you don't. But I must say that when I caught you under the jail that night I would have sworn that you was standing in with Brentwood. I didn't see your face that night; but I know now that you're the fellow."

"Yes!" Sol replied, with a look of ferocious hate. "I intended to cut my way into the jail and put a knife into him."

"What for?"

"For the same reason that made you place the bomb under there! I can put two and two together and make four out of them as well as the next man."

Emerald winced.

"Don't ask me any questions if you don't want me to say what I think!" Saffron blurted,

savagely. "I've killed him twice, and I'll kill him again!"

He leaned forward, fixed his burning eyes on the face of Emerald Green, and whispered, in a hollow, awe-struck voice:

"Do you believe in spirits? Sometimes I think that Bob Brentwood must be a spirit. I shot him through the heart, man! I tell you I shot him through the heart. There can't be any mistake about it. I saw him lying there on the bloody grass, with the crowd around him, and he was dead! Now he's alive again. Tell me what it means."

He grasped Emerald by the shoulder and drew him forward until his blazing eyes looked fairly into those of the sport; while his hot, panting breath fell upon Emerald's blanching cheeks.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the sport, wrenching himself away. "You give one the horrors."

He had caught the glare of true insanity in those burning eyes, and feared to trust himself longer there.

"You looked then as if you would like to knife me. Save those looks for Brentwood; and remember that I'll stand by you!"

He hurried precipitately from the stable, anxious to get as far as possible from those terrible eyes.

"By Jupiter!" he ejaculated, wiping the sweat from his clammy forehead. "The fellow is as mad as a March hare!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BETTY MORGAN'S GRIEF.

WHEN the pursuit of Saffron Sol was commenced, Rosenthal looked carefully around to see if any one was observing him, and then started in the other direction, carrying the bomb.

Twice that deadly missile had threatened his life. Now that it was in his possession, he resolved that it should not be so used again.

He did not stop until he reached a deep and partially filled-in well beyond the limits of the town. It had not been used for months. A rusty tin-bucket and a long rotten rope lay by the curbing. Into this well he determined to send the bomb. He knew of no way in which he could conveniently and safely destroy it; and he feared to leave it anywhere above ground. If accidentally exploded at any time, at that great depth, it would probably do no more than wreck the well.

He examined the rope carefully, placed the bomb in the bucket and slowly lowered it into the black depths. When the bucket seemed to have touched the bottom, he dropped the rope in after it and hurried away.

The Tom-cat was still with the searching-party; and Rosenthal hastened to the shop. He wanted to think over the singular events of the morning. The sudden appearance of so reckless and dangerous an enemy as Saffron Sol had shown himself to be, rather upset his nerves. An enemy who, in seeking to kill you, shows no regard for his own life, is indeed an enemy to be feared.

And, too, Rosenthal was at a loss to account for the motive that prompted Saffron Sol in his murderous attacks. So far as he knew, they were total strangers to each other. He could not remember that he had ever seen Saffron Sol before coming to the town of Eli.

Had it not been for the peculiar character of the assault he would have felt certain that Saffron Sol was some desperate assassin in the pay of Emerald Green. But that could not be. The hurtling bomb jeopardized the life of Emerald Green equally as much as it did the life of the pretended Jew.

After an hour's vain pondering, he was forced to acknowledge that the problem was too difficult for him to solve.

While he was still thinking upon the subject, a timid knock was heard at the back door. Fearing it might have been made by some enemy, he peeped through a window before venturing to answer the summons. A boy stood on the low steps, holding a letter in his hand.

No one else seemed near, and Rosenthal quickly opened the door.

"A letter for you!" said the boy, tossing it into the room; and then hurrying away before the detective had time to question him.

Rosenthal picked the letter up from the floor, spread it out on his knee and eagerly devoured its contents.

It was, or purported to be, from Betty Morgan. Short and to the point, it simply stated that she was at the house of a friend and wished to see him on a matter of great importance. The street and location of the house were given.

"This may be a trick!" he mused, as he read

the letter over. "It's worth investigating, however. I am not acquainted with Betty's—I mean Miss Morgan's—handwriting, and my suspicions alone suggest that this may be a ruse of Emerald Green's. Miss Morgan has had plenty of time in which to reach Eli; and she would probably come direct to the town when she found me gone."

There was a rap at the front entrance; not timid, like the first, but vigorous and resounding.

"Hello, Moses! Ef you're in thar, open the door!"

It was the voice of the Tom-cat; and Rosenthal unlocked the door without further hesitation.

"The feller took wings, I reckon!" said the cowboy, as he stalked into the room. "Couldn't find claw ner feather of him."

"I'm glad you came just now!" Rosenthal interrupted, placing the letter in the cowboy's hands. "That's from Miss Morgan; and she wishes me to meet her at a certain house down the street. It may be one of Emerald Green's tricks to get me into his power; but, anyway, I can't afford not to look into it."

"I intend to visit that house. It's high time we made some move. You can trust me to look out for myself. However, if I shouldn't come back in an hour, you can proceed to make an investigation of the cause. If you can neither find me nor learn what has become of me, ride, hot-footed, for the Morgan cabin. I think Williamson and his cowboys are there, or in the vicinity; and you will then have to determine what course to pursue, after consultation with him."

The Tom-cat commenced a protest; but Rosenthal paid no heed to it, and soon after left the shop.

Men were gathered on the main thoroughfare, in little groups, discussing the events of the morning; but Rosenthal carefully avoided their notice by keeping to the back streets.

The house was not difficult to find. His knock was answered by a woman, with a face so kindly and pleasant that his doubts and misgivings dissolved like the morning mist.

"Miss Morgan! Yes; you will find her in the parlor. Your name is Rosenthal, I presume?"

She turned about and led the way to the room indicated.

On entering it, Rosenthal was surprised to find that Bett had been weeping bitterly. There were still traces of tears on her cheeks.

"Why—why, what is the meaning of this?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Oh, Mr. Brentwood!" the poor girl exclaimed. "It's too horrible to mention, almost. How can I ever go home again? Father is one of the—"

She stopped, and again gave way to a flood of grief.

"I think I know what you mean!" he said, gently. "But, unless you desire, you need not unnecessarily wound your feelings by telling me."

"Oh, it's dreadful, Mr. Brentwood!" moaned the unhappy girl. "My father one of the Emerald Tigers! How can I ever look an honest person in the face again?"

"Tell me!" said the detective, endeavoring to draw her thoughts from so unpleasant a subject. "How comes it that I find you here?"

Thus prompted, Betty, with many halts and much hesitation, told her story, beginning with her arrival at Williamson's ranch.

"I was insane for a little while, I believe, Mr. Brentwood!" she said, piteously. "The horrid words which I heard father utter almost crushed me. It was blind instinct alone that led me to this house, the house of my friend, Mrs. Simpson. When I rushed away from that saloon, with those awful words ringing in my ears, I had no desire, no thought but to get as far away from there as possible. I thought the mental torture would kill me."

The detective gave her a look that was more than simply a look of friendly and sympathetic interest. It had in it something of the light of love.

"I have some opinions in regard to this matter that I will reveal to you when I have tested them more fully. In the mean time try not to think about it. I can assure you, Miss Morgan, that whatever your father proves to be will not in the least lessen the respect and esteem which I entertain for you."

The grateful and trustful glance with which she replied conveyed more than mere words could have done.

"Williamson's men are hidden in the ravines, I believe you stated?"

"Yes! And that reminds me!" Betty exclaimed, with more animation than she had yet shown. "How came that hole in the door?"

It was a question that the detective would have preferred avoiding, for it could only reveal Morgan's treachery and duplicity still more clearly. But the question had been asked; and he answered it, toning the rough shades down as much as a due regard for truth would allow.

"And to think that he is my father!" Betty cried, the tears shining in her lustrous eyes.

"It is important that I go at once to Williamson!" continued the detective, taking no notice of the exclamation. "We must move on the Tigers while their forces are divided."

"I am afraid to remain here and I dare not return home!" Betty moaned. "Would it be impossible for me to go with you?"

"Why do you fear to remain here?" with a surprised look.

"I saw one of Emerald's men looking in at me from the window this morning," explained Betty. "After what I heard at the Squatters' Rest that naturally makes me nervous. I fear something may befall me while you are away!"

"I will see that you have proper protection!" he assured her. "There is a man in my shop, now, who is worth a dozen ordinary fighting men. He is a little singular in his ways and insists on calling himself the Texas Tom-cat, but I can assure you that he is thoroughly reliable and as brave as a lion."

"With your consent I will have him remain here in the house, within easy call, during my absence. You could find no better protector."

Betty demurred slightly, but at last consented to the arrangement, and Rosenthal hastened away to prepare for his expected journey.

CHAPTER XV.

WHIPPED TIGERS.

"HOUR'S a little more'n up," said the Tom-cat, as Rosenthal re-entered the shop. "I was just a-gittin' ready to go after you. Thought mebbe the Tigers had jumped on you from some p'int in the jungle and teetotally devoured you."

Rosenthal laughed.

"Nothing of the kind, Tom-cat. The interview lasted a little longer than I expected it to, that's all."

"Kinder interestin', eh? Waal, when a feller gits to chinnin' a han'some young woman, it is purty tough to have to pull up his picket-pin an' move on. Grass is a little sweeter roun' than any other part o' the range. That's been my experience, too."

The detective almost blushed at this sally.

"Miss Betty is a handsome young woman, I'll admit; but I won't say that your shot struck anywhere near the target."

"Hit the bull's-eye plum'-center," chuckled the cowboy. "I reckon you'll give me a invite to the weddin'."

"Yes, when it takes place. That will not be to-day, however. For the present we have something more important to consider. I start for Morgan's cabin in less than a half-hour."

This was news, and the cowboy looked up questioningly.

"I think it advisable to take the horse that Miss Morgan rode into town. That's it, standing at that hitching-post. No doubt it is thirsty and hungry. I can't stay to feed it, however. If you will see that it is watered, then ride it to the far end of the alley and hitch it there, I will be obliged to you."

"Then the gal that went into the saloon this mornin' was Miss Morgan?" the Tom-cat questioned.

"Yes. She is at a house down street which I will point out to you directly. If I take her horse and get out of the town unobserved, the Emerald Tigers will not suspect my absence. The absence of my own horse would create such a suspicion immediately. They are so excited they may not notice that the horse is gone; and if they do they will think that Miss Morgan has stolen a march on them and slipped away unobserved."

"But they may see me!" the Tom-cat protested.

"Put on this coat and hat and your movements will attract no attention!"

The detective tossed him a shabby coat and a soft, broad-brimmed hat.

"But before you go there is one thing more I wish to speak of. Miss Morgan thinks that her place of refuge has been discovered by the Tigers. She fears that some trouble may befall her while I am away."

"I want you to go to the house where she is and remain there until my return. Go there as secretly and quietly as you can. Keep your

eyes and ears open; and if the Tigers attempt any tricks you will know what to do."

"Thought I war goin' with you!" the Tom-cat howled.

"I would be glad to have your company," assured Rosenthal, "for I expect to see some hot work before I get back. But just now this other is the most important."

"An' what ef the boss Tiger wants to continner the game that was bu'sted this mornin'? I've been expectin' it; and so hyer the hull hour you war gone, jest a-drawin' my claws in an' out, a-gittin' ready fer him."

"Keep out of his way!" was the positive and rather stern reply. "Don't allow yourself to be drawn from the house. If they discover your whereabouts they may try something of the kind to get you away from there. Keep shady and don't be led into any trap."

"Tigers ag'in Tom-cats. I'd like to meet 'em in a squar' fight! But, it's your say, Moses. You're the boss o' the round-up on this trip, an' mum's the word. Hang it all, it goes ag'in' the grain! But I'll do it."

"I knew you would!" said the detective, giving the cowboy his hand. "It isn't the first time I've trusted you. Now, if you'll look after the horse, I'll do a little bit of disguising and try to get away from here without being spotted."

When the Tom-cat had departed on his mission, Rosenthal carefully bathed and re-bandaged his head. Then he cast aside the Jewish masquerading garb and arrayed himself in a very becoming suit. A soft, felt hat, placed jauntily upon one side of his head to conceal the wound, and a false beard completed the disguise; and so great was the transformation that detection seemed almost impossible.

Even the cowboy, when he returned to the office, did not at first recognize him.

As further delay was useless, and might prove perilous, the detective gave the cowboy the instructions necessary to enable him to find the house where Betty Morgan had taken refuge. Then he slipped out at the rear entrance and hurried down the deserted alley.

A little later he was mounted on Williamson's horse, and speeding at a rapid gait toward the Morgan cabin.

It was past noon considerably when he reached it. No one was there; but a man rode out of the nearest ravine and came rapidly toward him.

It proved to be one of Williamson's cowboys, and Rosenthal returned with him to the ravine, where Williamson and his men were in waiting.

Williamson was almost insane from the long suspense.

"I regret the delay exceedingly!" said the detective. "But if you will give the word, we will delay no longer. I am ready and eager to pilot you to the lair of the Tigers. A number of them, with Emerald Green, their chief, are now in Eli. This division of their force will necessarily weaken them, and I believe we will have no difficulty in routing them and rescuing your son."

So impatient was Williamson that he gave the word of command almost before Rosenthal ceased speaking, and the little cavalcade dashed away toward the cedar gorge.

Williamson and his cowboys were familiar with the location of the gorge; in fact, as detailed in a preceding chapter, they had there met and been deceived by the Emerald Tigers only a few days before. But they had not been aware of the fact that the gorge concealed in its gloomy depths the mouth of a cavern.

When they reached the upper end of the gorge the afternoon was far spent; but, notwithstanding the fact that their horses were pretty well blown, Williamson urged an immediate advance.

"Before we go on, there are two things that ought to be looked to," explained the detective. "I know you are anxious to proceed, Mr. Williamson; but you must remember the old adage, 'Haste makes waste.'

"The Tigers have not discovered us, I feel tolerably certain, unless they have sentinels concealed somewhere on the plains. I don't think that is at all probable. They are, no doubt, trusting in the secrecy of their retreat for safety.

"Now, if we dash in from this end, they may escape at the other. Send a detachment of men to the other end, and they can only get away by climbing the canyon-like walls.

"I think it best that I should advance first. If possible, I will crawl into the cavern, and be ready to protect your son—with my life, if necessary. When I start, the detachment that

is to go to the other end of the gorge can also start. By keeping to the ravines, they can avoid discovery.

"You must know that I have never been here, but gained my knowledge by overhearing a conversation between the Tiger leaders. Their directions were sufficiently explicit, however, to enable me to find the place. There is a 'pocket' not far from the other end of the gorge, and in that pocket is the mouth of the cave. When I reach it I will retreat five hundred steps, and tie my handkerchief to a bush on the right side of the cliff. When you see that handkerchief, dig your spurs into your horses and charge with a yell. You will start just forty minutes after I do."

The plan was extremely simple; and no time was lost in carrying it out.

Rosenthal advanced cautiously on foot; and the detachment moved forward in a parallel line, through a deep ravine.

Twenty minutes' vigorous walking brought the detective to what he considered dangerous ground. Then he advanced in a creeping, cat-like manner, until he came to the "pocket." It was a deep and dark hole, the further end concealed by a mass of gnarled and scrubby cedars.

Satisfied that this was the place, he cautiously retraced his way, hung his handkerchief in a prominent place and again crept forward.

Drawing a revolver, he crawled toward the cedar thicket. No sentinel was in sight; and everything was so quiet he feared he might find the place deserted.

But, as he drew near, the low hum of voices reassured him. Peering through the interstices of the low branches he saw about a dozen men reclining various attitudes about the mouth of the cave. Some were smoking and talking, some sleeping and some playing cards.

At one side sat a boy that Rosenthal knew was Williamson's son. He was not bound; but a surly, villainous-looking ruffian lay on the ground not far away, with a revolver in his hand.

The detective had only time to make these observations, when he heard the charging yell of Williamson's cowboys. He had not expected it so soon; but Williamson was too impatient to delay the matter a moment longer than the time allowed.

The surprised Tigers started up, with oaths and exclamations of alarm; and the villain detailed to watch over the boy leveled his cocked revolver at the helpless lad and began to back toward the cavern. There was murder in his eyes; and Rosenthal fully expected to see the flash of the weapon and hear the report.

"It's your life or the boy's, I calculate!" he gritted, as he brought his own weapon to a level and hastily sighted it. "I hate to do it, but it can't be helped; so down goes your meat-house!"

At the crack of the revolver the Tiger threw up his hands and reeled; and Williamson's cowboys charged into the "pocket," with thunder-hoofs and startling yells.

The outlaws retreated into the cavern, fighting desperately; and those not slain, escaped by another entrance, of which Rosenthal had no previous knowledge.

It was quick and hot work, followed by a decisive victory.

The meeting between father and son was pathetic and tearful.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SLEEPY TOM-CAT.

The Tom-cat disliked the change made in his head-gear by the necessities of disguising; and when he visited Mrs. Simpson's residence he carried his cat-skin cap tucked away in a capacious pocket of his coat.

After the formalities of introduction were over, he retreated awkwardly to the room assigned him and proceeded, with much satisfaction, to array himself in his own original and unique style.

"I'd ruther fight Tigers any day!" he exclaimed, mopping the perspiration from his streaming face. "The ideer o' the Texas Tom-cat a-doin' the agreeable to ladies! Actilly a-settin' in the parlor a-twiddlin' his thumbs like a dude! It's too much. When it comes to ropin' a steer, er checkin' a stampede, er fightin', I'm a hull team and a dog under the wagon. But I wasn't borned to be a man o' fashion; not by a jugful!

"Now, Moses cu'd do that, I'll warrant ye, an' enj'y it; but I can't. When that 'ere young lady looks at me with them bloomin' eyes o' hern, like big, blue flowers, it goes clean to my gizzard, an' I jest nater'ly wilt."

The room occupied by the cowboy had a curtained window overlooking the street and the principal portion of the town. From it the "Squatter's Rest," Rosenthal's shop and a section of the main street was visible.

Behind this curtained window he stationed himself; and all through the long hours of the afternoon stared at the passers-by and the knots of excited men on the street corners.

"They ain't got over talkin' about that bomb-shell bizness yet! That thar Emerald seems to be pokin' his nose around purty lively. Mebbe he's a-huntin' yours truly. Ef't warn't fer the boss's orders he c'u'd find him mighty suddent. Goes ag'in' the grain to be a-snoopin' aroun' this away when thar's a man that wants to see you 'special!'

"Tain't the Tom-cat's style; but I'm bound to look after this young heifer, er bu'st. I reckon of the Tiger chief know'd t' Moses was this minnit a-cuttin' sticks fer the Morgan ranch he'd buzz around some livelier'n he is!"

It was with the greatest difficulty that the cowboy was induced to partake of supper with the Simpson family and pretty Betty Morgan.

"I ain't the least mite hungry, ma'am!" he protested. "Lord love ye, I've gone a hull week without eatin', often!"

But Mrs. Simpson would not take "no" for an answer; and the Tom-cat followed her sheepishly into the dining-room.

Mrs. Simpson offered to care for his outlandish cap, but he insisted on placing it on the chair beneath him, and sitting on it.

"Can't hurt the thing by settin' on it, ma'am; fer I use it as a piller, often! Tain't any use o' puttin' you to bother 'bout an ole catskin cap."

Betty Morgan sat at his elbow; and kept up a running fire of conversation in order to draw his thoughts away from himself. But the effort was a failure. The Tom-cat ate a few mouthfuls, gulped down a cup of hot coffee and, after surreptitiously secreting a biscuit in his catskin cap, beat a hasty retreat.

"Powerful good feedin'!" he muttered, as he munched the stolen biscuit in the seclusion of his own room. "An' the table war act'illy a-groanin' with it. But thar's jest some things the Texas Tom-cat can't stand; and society's one o' em!"

The cowboy had had no sleep the previous night; and, as darkness came on, an intense drowsiness took possession of him.

For hours he fought it off, by rubbing his eyes and staring at the twinkling lights of the town. One by one these went out. The streets grew quiet. The wind ceased its usual shrieking, and sung only the gentlest of lullabys.

The droning of insects grew into the semblance of a low cradle-song; and the Tom-cat's head fell helplessly forward upon his broad breast.

Just before daybreak a rider dashed recklessly up the streets of Eli, leaped from his foaming steed and hurried into the Squatters' Rest.

The bar-room was deserted by all save Gabriel Crane, who was reclining, half-asleep, on a billiard table.

"Where's Emerald?" asked the man, as Crane started up.

"In his room up-stairs asleep, I reckon! He went up there 'bout two hours ago. Anything bu'sted?"

"Bu'sted?" howled the new-comer. "Ever'thing's gone to 'tarnal smash. Hustle 'im down hyer, lively!"

Crane did not wait to hear more, but hurried away to arouse the Tiger chief.

"What's up?" demanded Emerald, bounding down-stairs a few moments later, armed and fully dressed.

"The Tigers hez been whipped, cleaned-out root an' branch, kerflummixed! That's what's the matter!"

"Why—when—how did it happen?" stammered the chief, sinking into a chair, ghastly pale. "Be quick! Tell me all about it!"

"Williamson's cowboys charged us, an' afore you could think twice thar was enough dead men a-layin' around to start a young graveyard. Some got away and scooted fer the Panhandle. I was follerin' 'em, when I run across a pony. I thought you ort to hev the word ef I could git it to you; and you kin bet I put that pony through."

"When was this?"

"Jest afore dark las' night! We warn't thinkin' o' anything o' the kind and they caught us nappin'! It was nigh about midnight when I got bolt o' the boss."

"Then, if they should come this way!"

"They'd be likely to git hyer purty soon! But they ain't a-goin' to do any sech ridin' ez I

done, I kin tell you. They'll be apt to rest up awhile. I don't calc'late they'll git hyer tell after daylight, ef they come at all. An' I don't see why they shed come."

"It's an hour until daylight!" said Emerald, looking at his watch. "Rustle out the boys, you and Crane. Stir around lively, and as soon as you find one start him after another. Get horses for all of us!"

"Now I must find Grizzly!" as they hastened away in obedience to his orders. "The town will soon be too hot to hold us. That infernal detective is at the bottom of the whole thing, I've an idea, and he'll head for Eli just as soon as he gets in shape to travel."

"The Tigers have been whipped, and the jig's up; but I'm not going to leave the town without that girl. Morgan said I could have her; and I will!"

He left the saloon and went directly to Grizzly Martin's office.

"Wake up!" he cried, hammering upon the door with the butt of his revolver. "Rouse thee, my festive mayor, for the devil is unchained!"

Grizzly was a light sleeper, and came to the door promptly, in answer to the summons.

"We must *git!*" was Emerald's sententious statement. "The Tigers have been downed in their own jungle."

"The devil!" exclaimed Grizzly, stepping out upon the sidewalk.

"No, it wasn't the gentleman with the hoofs and tail that did it. It was this detective, Bob Brentwood, whom you have all along regarded as an Israelite without guile. Brentwood and Williamson's cowboys."

"Get your tools, for I have a little job that I want you to assist me in, before we shake the dust of Eli from our feet forever."

"They're hyer!" said Grizzly, producing a brace of revolvers. "Now, what air you figgerin' on?"

"I intend to take Betty Morgan with me!" with a harsh laugh. "She's at Simpson's, down the street. One of the boys spotted her there yesterday. Morgan's a drunken fool; but he said I could have her, and I intend to."

"Thar's danger in it, p'raps!" said Grizzly. "You hain't told me the full p'ticklers; but from what you said, I shu'd think we'd better be losin'."

"No danger in the world!" Emerald insisted. "The boys are getting the horses ready. She has no reason to anticipate anything of the kind. We can take her easily, and get out of town before daylight; and no one will be the wiser."

They were proceeding down the street; and Emerald outlined the plan in hand and related all he knew about the unexpected defeat of the Tigers.

The red dawn was just streaking the east when the Tom-cat was awakened by a feminine scream. He could scarcely realize that he had been asleep so great a length of time.

Throwing the curtain aside, he looked out and saw two men hurry around the corner of the building and into the street.

"Blast 'er!" exclaimed one of the men, roughly, as a second scream rent the air. "Stuff that blanket into her mouth, er she'll have the hull town onto us!"

In that last scream, the Tom-cat recognized the voice of Betty Morgan. The surprise almost paralyzed him, and before he could recover from it the men disappeared with their burden behind the building.

The bellow of rage that broke from the lips of the cowboy would have done credit to a mad bull.

He threw up the window-sash, leaped headlong to the earth below, and darted in pursuit.

When he came up with them, they were surrounded by horsemen. Grizzly was hoisting the unconscious girl to one of these, Emerald had mounted and was ready to lead the flight.

"Tigers ag'in' tom-cats!" yelled the cowboy, advancing at a run. "Drap that female er I'll plug you!"

The order was not heeded, and the pop of his revolver followed close after it. Grizzly swung around, clutched at the air and fell dead in the street; but the girl was caught by the horseman and the cavalcade galloped away, firing at the pursuer.

"Rouse, ye cripples!" shouted the Tom-cat, dashing after them on foot and firing at every jump. "Wake, ye sleepers! Whar's the fightin' men o' this blasted, measly town? Clory-formed the'rsevles, I reckon, to keep out o' a muss. Mariar! Mariar! Meeow-ow! Whoop! Git up, somebody, an' help me down 'em!"

A chorus of yells at the further end of the street announced that aid was at hand, and a

few minutes later the Tigers came slowly back, retreating before an opposing force.

That opposing force was Williamson's cowboys, led by Brentwood, the detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAFFRON SOL'S LAST MOVE.

GREAT was the joy of the Tom-cat when he realized the turn affairs had taken. His chase, on foot after the horsemen had been urged by a wild and almost hopeless impulse.

Now he believed it possible to effect the rescue of the girl, single-handed. The Tigers had all they could attend to in watching the cowboys before whom they were falling back. Crouching low like a veritable cat, the cowboy waited until the horseman who held the girl reached a point opposite. Then he launched himself at the rascal's throat, with the bound of a mountain lion.

But the horse shied, wheeled suddenly and the Tom-cat was hurled to the earth. Before he could regain his feet the Tigers had passed!

Ca'ching a horse whose saddle had been emptied by a pistol-shot he fell in with Williamson's cowboys, forged to the front and assisted in leading the advance.

"Crowd 'em, ye snails! Crowd 'em!" he yelled, swinging his revolver and going through his usual cat serenade. "Tom-cats ag'in' Tigers! Whoop! Crowd 'em!"

As the advance was continued up the street Emerald Green's followers received a large augmentation from his admirers in the town. Morgan also joined him, and the strange sight was witnessed of a father assisting in the attempted abduction of his daughter.

By the time they reached the Squatter's Rest the Tiger force was so increased that Emerald decided on a bold movement.

Spurring his horse to the side of that of the man who held the insensible form of Betty Morgan, he raised his revolver, and shouted:

"Back, every man of you! If you crowd me, Bob Brentwood, by the Eternal, I will kill this girl before your very eyes!"

But there was another near, his presence all unsuspected, who was destined to change the drift of events, as he had done on more than one previous occasion.

That other was Saffron Sol, the man with a shadow—the man of mystery, whose eccentric actions and secret impulses no one had, so far, been able to fathom.

When, from his place of concealment, he saw the Tigers retreating up the street before the force led by the detective, he crept forth and hastened by a rear route to the Squatter's Rest.

He hurried through the deserted saloon and up to the room occupied by Emerald Green in the upper story. In this room he had been ensconced, in consultation with the Tiger chief, during the early hours of the night just passed.

His restless, beady eyes, roving constantly about, had alighted upon a second bomb concealed beneath a bundle of rags under the bed.

He did not mention the discovery, but his eyes took on a peculiarly crafty look as the conversation proceeded.

Now, as he looked out upon the street, he rubbed his skinny hands together and chuckled with fiendish glee.

He saw that the opposing forces would be compelled to pass beneath the window at which he was stationed, and he determined to again attempt the plan that had so signally failed at the time of the duel.

He drew the bomb from its place of concealment, turned it over and over, gloatingly, in his hands; and stationed himself at the window.

"I warn you that I will shoot her dead!" again cried the Tiger chief, as the detective spurred his horse almost alongside.

"Now is the time!" whispered Saffron Sol, opening and shutting his disengaged hand with a convulsive movement. "Bob Brentwood cannot escape me now. I can throw this bomb right under his horse's feet."

Then, raising his voice until it ended in a maniacal laugh.

"Bob Brentwood, beware! You have followed me half-way across this continent! You'll follow me no longer, for this bomb will dig your grave. Ha! ha! ha!"

Those startling words, shrieked in a high, shrill key, followed by that blood-curdling laugh, drew every eye to the window.

Raising the bomb, he poised it aloft, as he fixed his burning eyes on his intended victim.

He failed to notice the quick motion made by the Tom-cat. A revolver gleamed for an in-

stant in the first rays of the rising sun, and a bullet plowed its way through Saffron Sol's uplifted arm. By a snap-shot the cowboy had winged the intended assassin!

The result that followed was terrible. The bomb fell from the nerveless hand, striking the floor of the room with a crash. The resultant explosion killed Saffron Sol instantly, wrecked the building, slew the horse ridden by Emerald Green and stretched Morgan and a number of the Tigers, who were nearest the chief, bleeding and senseless upon the ground.

Half-stunned and dazed, Emerald still had sufficient presence of mind to realize that his safety lay in flight. He extricated himself hastily from the tangled trappings of the fallen steed, leaped upon a horse that had been made riderless, and dashed madly away.

The shock had deafened and confused the detective, but his senses quickly returned when he saw the man, who was clasping the form of Betty Morgan, reel in his saddle and allow the girl to slip to the ground in a limp heap.

One bound placed Brentwood at the side of the woman he loved. As he bent above her, Betty opened her eyes, restored to consciousness perhaps by the tremendous concussion. She smiled faintly, as she saw his eyes looking tenderly into her own.

"This is no place for you!" he said, lifting her as gently and easily as if she were an infant.

She did not resist him or shrink from his touch; and he carried her, with rapid steps, to the residence of Mrs. Simpson.

"I think I can walk, now!" she said, as they turned into the yard; and he accordingly placed her upon her feet. But, she still clung to him like a frightened child.

Mrs. Simpson and her family, alarmed by the troubled outlook of the morning, had sought refuge at a neighbor's; a fact which Brentwood noted with secret pleasure.

When they had gained the house, Brentwood hurried for a pitcher of water. Liberal applications of the water, aided by a glass of wine, soon brought the roses back to Betty Morgan's cheeks.

Of the injuries received by her father she had no knowledge. The detective was almost equally ignorant. He had seen Morgan fall, but whether killed or only stunned he knew not. So he wisely held his peace on that subject, knowing that time would reveal all the facts.

"How can I ever repay you, Mr. Brentwood?" Betty exclaimed, with a seriousness that was half-pleasure and half-pain.

Brentwood was kneeling at her feet, as she asked the question; and a glance more tender than that of friendship came into his speaking eyes.

Betty saw that glance and the color crept to the roots of her dark-brown hair.

"There is one way, Betty—Miss Morgan, I should say! It may be madness, folly in me to indulge in such hopes. But one may covet the stars, I suppose, if he can never possess them!"

Her drooping lashes covered her glorious eyes, and her face, over which the tell-tale flushes chased each other, was half-averted.

"I must confess that I have felt a strange interest in you ever since our first meeting," he continued, noting the look and attitude with a glance, the keenness of which was intensified by the deep love he felt for the beautiful girl before him.

"That feeling has grown into a passion that has overwhelmed me. Yes, Miss Morgan, I can no longer conceal from myself the fact that I love you as I never loved woman before. The slightest assurance that you entertain for me a tithe of the affection I hold for you, will amply repay me!"

Betty Morgan had not anticipated such a reply to her question.

"Oh, Mr. Brentwood, you forget that my father is a—"

She hesitated and drew shrinkingly away from him.

"I forget nothing, Miss Morgan. Whatever your father may be does not in the least lessen my love for you. Miss Morgan, Betty, can you not say that you love me well enough to become my wife?"

She trembled slightly, but she had ceased to resist his advances; and when he drew her boldly to his heart, she nestled against it, believing that she would never find a purer shrine for her affections.

"You do love me, Betty, do you not?" he asked, looking down into her tear-wet eyes.

"Since I first saw you, Mr. Brentwood! I love you better than any being upon this earth!"

Her voice was tremulous, yet clear; and

Brentwood knew, in that supremely happy moment, that he had won a love that would last until the light of those glorious eyes was quenched in death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE Tom-cat witnessed the flight of Emerald Green and instantly spurred his horse in pursuit.

It was a hot chase, for both were well mounted.

"Tom-cats ag'in' Tigers; an' the Tiger is a runnin' from the Tom cat!" yelled the cowboy, exultantly, as he dashed up the street and out toward the broad plains. "Whoop! Mariar! Mariar! Stop, you striped jungle-cat! Stop er I'll start a lead mine under yer ornery skin!"

But, just at that moment Emerald Green had no notion of stopping. His only desire was to put as many grassy miles between his own precious body and the town of Eli as possible. He knew that the game had been played out and he was the loser; and he had a terrible fear of falling into the hands of the detective.

Once he swung around in the saddle and fired at his pursuer. The shot did no execution and caused such a loss of time that he resolved to trust to the speed of his horse alone.

The Tom-cat on the other hand was determined to take the Tiger chief alive, if it could possibly be done. The horse that bore him was a splendid runner; and was slowly but surely overhauling the one ridden by Emerald Green.

Over the horn of the cowboy's saddle was coiled a long *riata*, and in the use of this weapon the Tom-cat was an expert. The time for using the rope had not come, however, and he clutched a revolver in his right hand, as he urged the horse on by knees and spurs.

"A Tom-cat a-chasin' a Tiger. Whoop! Go it, Whirlwind. Fan the air—with them soople legs o' youn', ef you start a cyclone a-doin' of it. Five dollars to nuthin' that I ketch him within the next mile. Go-o-long!"

Seeing that the cowboy was rapidly overhauling him, Emerald Green again turned in his saddle and attempted to check the Tom-cat's advance with the revolver. But he was nervous and startled, and his shots flew wide of the mark. Perhaps he had not fully recovered from the effects of the bomb concussion.

The Tom-cat paid no heed to the balls that whistled about him. He only set his teeth harder, and dug the spurs deeper into the flanks of his straining horse.

"Whoop!" he yelled, as the Tiger chief, having emptied his weapon, again turned in flight. "The Tom-cat's got worse'n claws this time. He's got a tail with a loop in it; and he'll jest eternally snatch you out o' that saddle in less'n a hundred jumps."

It was with almost a shriek of terror that Emerald Green now urged on his laboring horse, casting a hurried and frightened glance over his shoulder at almost every leap the animal made.

But, strain and urge as he would, he could not escape. There was a pursuer after him who had all the eagerness and tenacity of a blood-hound.

Guiding his flying steed with his knees, the Tom-cat shifted the revolver to his left hand, and with his right hand grasped the coiled rope. Twice it flew around his head with a hiss, then shot out like an uncoiling serpent. The swishing loop dropped over the shoulders of the Tiger chief, and he was jerked incontinently from the back of his horse.

A half-hour later the Tom-cat re-entered Eli, with Emerald Green as a bound and helpless prisoner.

Perhaps the reader has been wondering how two persons could be led to think that that they had slain the same man, and yet find that man still alive.

Until he recognized, or imagined that he recognized, the detective, when the latter made his appearance in the guise of a Jew peddler, Emerald Green was positive that he had slain him. He had seen him fall, with a ghastly bullet-wound above his heart.

Saffron Sol also believed that he had slain Bob Brentwood in the same manner.

The explanation is simple. Bob Brentwood was a detective who had attempted to arrest the man who afterward became the chief of the Emerald Tigers. It was in an Eastern city, and Bob Brentwood fell, slain by a bullet from Emerald Green's revolver.

Saffron Sol was at the same time a fugitive

from justice, trembling in fear of arrest. He was in the throng which Brentwood approached when he came to arrest Emerald Green. Naturally Saffron Sol imagined that he was the man the detective wanted. He did not know Emerald Green, and in that mixed crowd of roughs the face of the sport altogether failed to attract his attention.

As Brentwood advanced upon them, with leveled weapon, Saffron Sol whipped out his revolver. It exploded before he had time to take any accurate aim, and the ball whistled harmlessly above the heads of the excited men. At the same instant the detective fell dead, slain by Emerald Green.

In the consequent rush and excitement each got away, firmly believing himself the slayer of Bob brentwood.

Bruce Brentwood, known to the reader as Rosenthal, the Jew, was Bob Brentwood's brother. A detective by profession and knowing that Emerald Green was the slayer of his brother, he determined to hunt the murderer to his death.

The pursuit led him to No Man's Land; and in that wild and partially civilized region Saffron Sol, half-crazed by years of crime and dissipation, also appeared to enact a singular and startling role.

Bob Morgan, the reputed father of Betty Morgan, was mortally wounded by the explosion of the bomb. He lived long enough, however, to reveal the fact that he was not Betty Morgan's father.

He had stolen her while she was yet almost an infant from the ranch of her father, Ben Williamson, who was then engaged in the cattle business in Central Texas.

He had intended to hold her for a reward, but the pursuit grew so warm that he feared to enter into any negotiations. He also formed an attachment for the little girl—an attachment as warm perhaps as his calloused heart was capable of forming—and he determined to rear her as his own child.

Years later, Ben Williamson, grown old and gray, moved, with all his earthly possessions, to the ranch which he now held on the North Fork of the Canadian.

Nothing was more natural than that Morgan should seek, as the criminal's paradise, the land that is controlled by no recognized Government, and where the people are a law unto themselves. So he came to No Man's Land, representing himself as a peaceful squatter, and leagued himself with the desperate band known as the Emerald Tigers.

The abduction of his son proved to Williamson a blessing in disguise, for it restored to him the daughter he had long mourned as dead.

The Emerald Tigers were thoroughly whipped and cowed. Nearly half their number had been slain. The others sought safety in flight; and their aiders and abettors in the town of Eli were forced into quiet and submission.

Gabriel Crane, the scoundrelly saloon-keeper, abandoned all he had, and, by means of a fast horse, succeeded in reaching the mountain fastnesses of New Mexico. He again entered the saloon business in a wild mining town, and was shot down behind his bar by a "bad man" from Denver.

Emerald Green was escorted by Williamson's cowboys to the Kansas border. There Bruce Brentwood placed him under legal arrest, and took him to the city where he had murdered Bob Brentwood.

He was given the benefit of the best legal talent he could employ, but the evidence against him was too strong, and, a year later, he exonerated his crime on the scaffold.

The Texas Tom-cat soon tired of life in Eli—"city life" he called it—and returned to the Texas ranges over which he had so long wandered. It is scarcely necessary to say that he bore with him the best wishes of a host of friends—and a handsome and well-filled purse, presented by Bruce Brentwood, for timely assistance rendered.

And as a fitting finale, allow me to add:

Bruce Brentwood and pretty Betty Williamson were married within the year. Their life has been happy and prosperous. They now have a son—a handsome, manly lad. They call him Bob; and the mother's eyes sparkle with a fond light when friends and neighbors tell her that he is the perfect image of his father, Bruce Brentwood, the detective. Bruce is her King!

THE END.

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